

TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

A Times of India publication

lonely planet

MAGAZINE  
INDIA

₹ 150  
April 2015

**Win!**  
PICK THE  
WINNERS OF  
THE LPMI TRAVEL  
AWARDS 2015 AND  
WIN A STAY IN  
ZANZIBAR

THE  
OTHER  
*Side*

## THE UNSEEN NETHERLANDS

Travel beyond Amsterdam and the tulips  
to find a countryside that beckons you  
to keep calm and carry on

## DISCOVER NEW MEXICO

It's got nature spirits, cave dwellings  
and some of the best chocolate you'll  
ever taste – and (spoiler alert) you might  
even bump into Spiderman



MW80150401

- \* Not just tigers: Madhya Pradesh has got a whole lot more going for it
- \* Sri Lanka's little-explored north-east is open to travellers and waiting for you
- \* Plus: paragliding in HP, diving in Tarkarli, café-hopping in Singapore, and more Easy Trips to go on NOW



# lonely planet

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## THE LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA PROMISE

*Lonely Planet Magazine India* provides trusted, independent travel advice and information that has been gathered without fear or favour.

We aim to provide you with options that cover a range of budgets and we reveal the positive and negative of all locations we visit.

Because we believe it is important that our journalists experience first-hand what they're writing about and because you require comprehensive information from every corner of the world, at times it may be necessary for us to seek assistance from travel providers such as tourist boards, airlines, hotels, national parks, etc. However, when receiving such assistance, we ensure our editorial integrity and independence are not compromised through the following measures:

- by publishing information on all appropriate travel suppliers and not just those who provided us with assistance
- by never promising to offer anything in return, such as positive coverage.

Disclaimer: All prices, flight and other transport details, contact details and other information have been provided by the respective corporations and/ or verified travel operators and are correct at the time of going to print. All prices listed for international destinations are calculated as per exchange rates prevalent at the time of going to print. *Lonely Planet Magazine India* and Worldwide Media cannot be held responsible for changes in such details after publishing.

### This Month's Cover



Windmills are synonymous with the Netherlands, and they're way cooler than you think. The most famous collection is at Kinderdijk outside Rotterdam, but others like the de Adriaan windmill in Haarlem are just as evocative

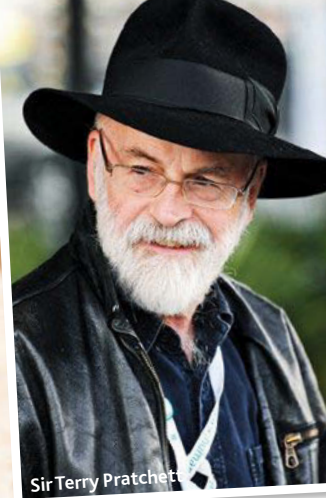
PHOTOGRAPH: VINOBA NATHAN



New Mexico



Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor  
Follow me on Twitter: @vardhan\_lpmag



Sir Terry Pratchett

## This month...

**Sir Terry Pratchett** passed away yesterday, and nothing will be the same again. If you've enjoyed my Editor's Notes, you have that man to thank, someone I've tried desperately to copy. You also have him to thank for our worldview: in his incredible books, it didn't matter whether you were white-skinned or black or green, whether you were made of stone or liked eating rat with ketchup, whether your culture included *bhong* music or the worship of a bull – and, indeed, whether you were an orang utan or even Death himself. You were to be celebrated, you deserved to be heard and understood, because people everywhere, in the end, are wonderful. And they're all the same, and they're all totally crazy. So thank you for the magic, sir. We'll all have to grow up a bit now, and that feels terrible.

Thankfully, the places we have in this issue might help stave that off a bit, because they're full of wonderful, crazy places that deserve to be known better. **The Netherlands** is a country I know a bit, and one that has way more to it than Amsterdam: even the cows are strange here, and its sweet, relaxed feel makes it feel like a far bigger country than it is. **New Mexico** in the USA is the opposite, known for a relaxed, artistic air, but full of eerie stories burrowing under the surface – and one lovely old priest. The war-torn **North-east Sri Lanka** is a place that absolutely needs you to visit, to help it climb back to normalcy – and it oh so deserves a visit. Under the grim history lies a string of gorgeous beaches, weird ruins and nuns who make wine – clearly a place we need to get to know better. And finally, there's **Madhya Pradesh**, a much-misunderstood state that gets lumped under "Um, tigers and something." It's fascinating and beautiful here.

And, more than anything else, I hope Sir Terry would've approved of this list.



### THE LPMI TRAVEL AWARDS 2015

Which was your favourite destination this year? Which was your favourite hotel? Which new destination would you like to visit next year? **Fill up the form (pg 37)** in this issue (or go to our Facebook page, *Lonely Planet Magazine India*) to vote for the winners, and you could win a **luxurious stay in mega-exotic Zanzibar**, with dolphins, colobus monkeys and old slave-markets for company.



The Netherlands



Sri Lanka

Madhya Pradesh



Please recycle when done with the magazine



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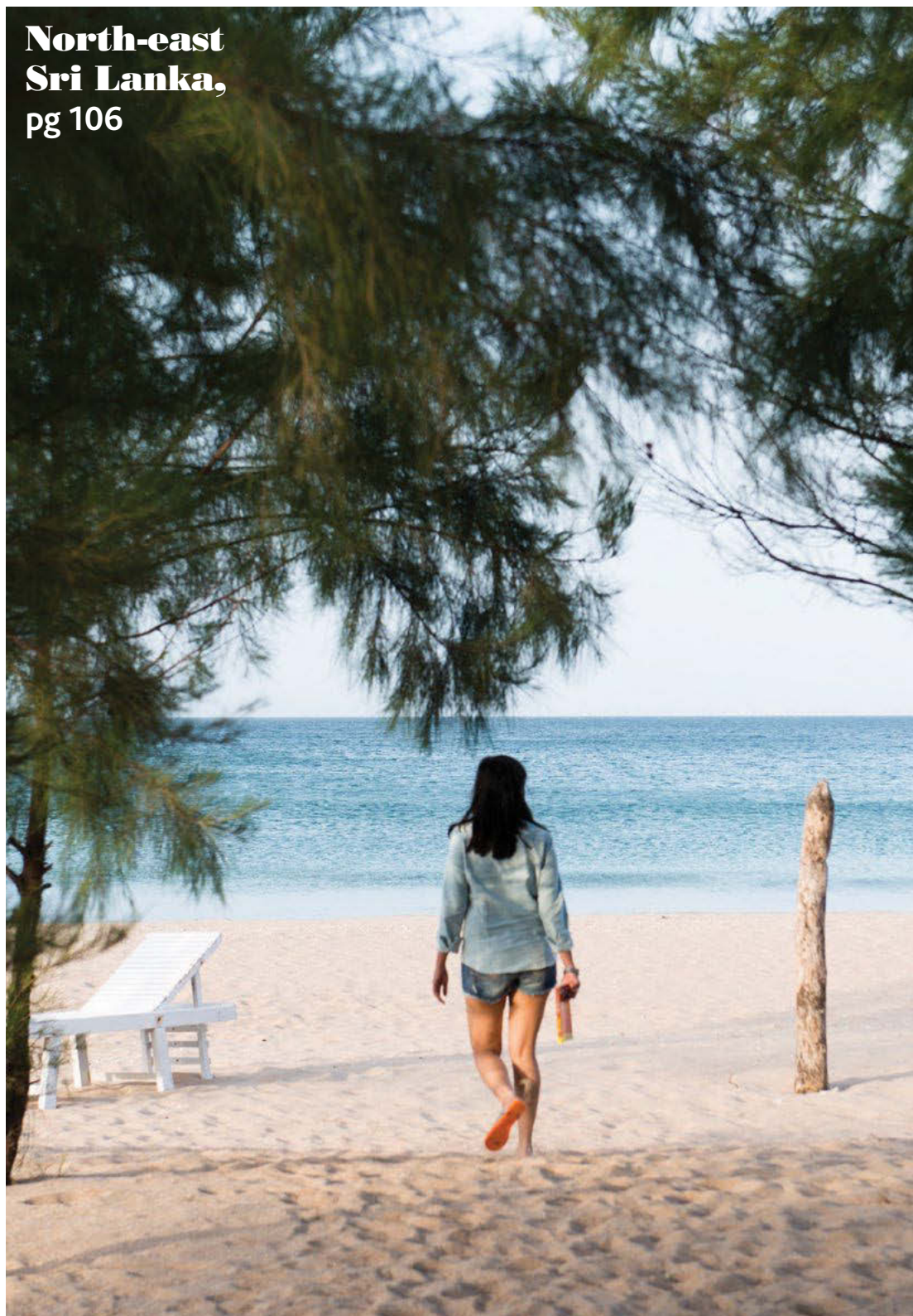
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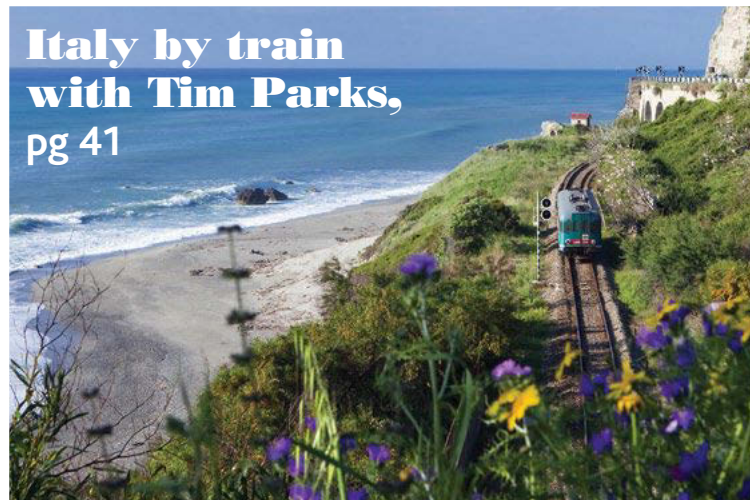




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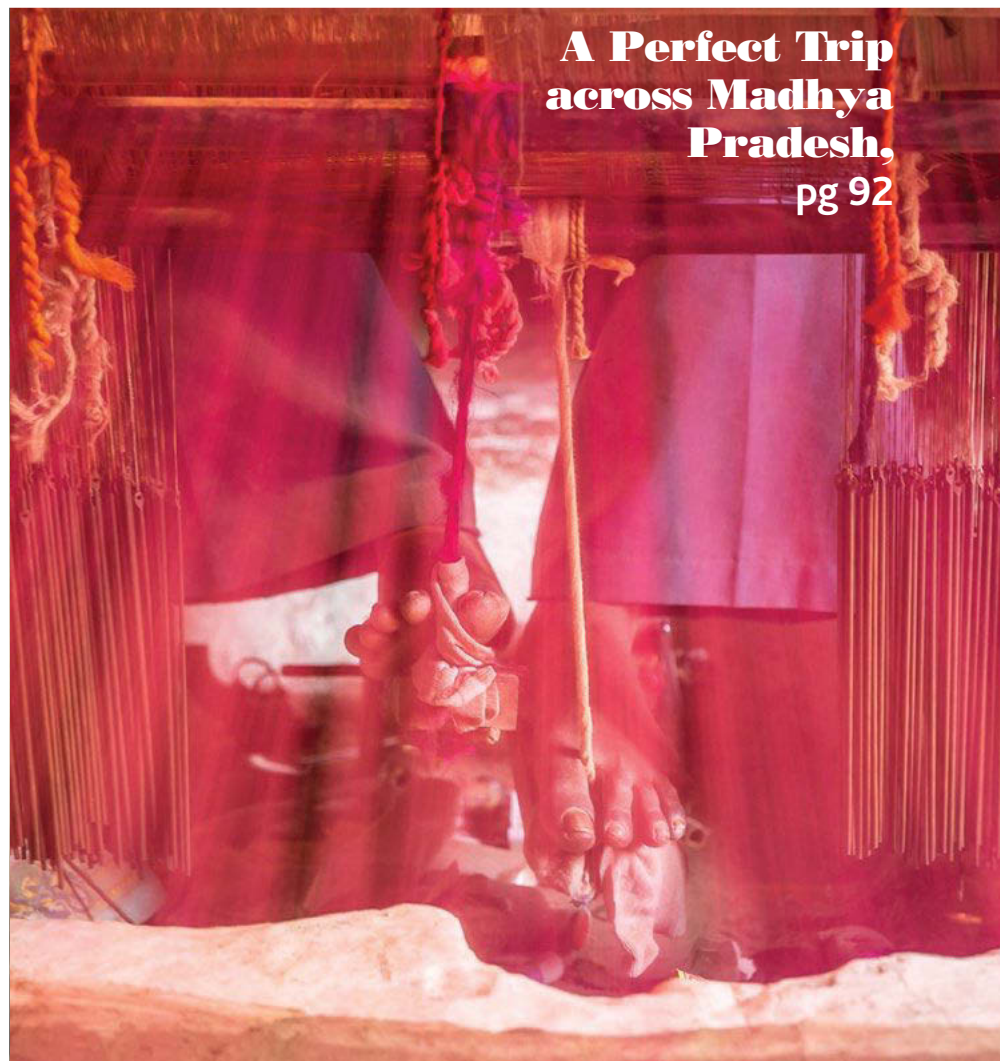
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PHOTOGRAPH: UNNIKRISHNAN RAVEENDRANATHAN

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# KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

Here's a quick guide to the sections and elements in our magazine, so you can max out your travel experience – and a menu of what's new in LPMI 2.0



## Globetrotter

The jam-packed Globetrotter section brings you closer to the world through photo features, cutaways, interviews with travel buffs, food and other tidbits, and also offers sage travel advice in the form of Q&As and news on deals and upcoming festivals. **Pg 25**



## The Photo Story

You can't really get much clearer than that name – a photographic journey that explores an interesting facet of a destination – architecture, wildlife, the great outdoors, food and drink... they all find their space here! **Pg 26**



## Country at a Glance

Country at a Glance is a bite-sized visit to a new country every issue. Discover each nation in terms of essential experiences, ways to get under its skin, words to use, trademark features as well as surprises to expect (sometimes, forewarning heightens anticipation!). **Pg 32**



## Postcards

This is your section entirely: we invite you, our readers, to send in photographs of special moments on your travels, little events or vistas that struck a chord or made you laugh. Tell us what you were doing there, and how this photograph came to be. Best of all, you don't need to be a professional photographer to be featured here. **Pg 10**



## Easy Trips

'Easy' is the operative word here. These trips are extremely simple to plan and head out on at short notice. Typically weekend trips from the larger cities in India, all our destinations are easily accessible. We also have a 'Go Now' badge: these trips are generally seasonal, and often linked to upcoming festivals or events. **Pg 44**



## Features

These are our longer, more elaborate stories, which get under the skin of a place. Each feature has a Make It Happen section; a practical guide with all the information you need to plan out this trip. This includes, where possible, the ideal, step-by-step itinerary to best enjoy a destination: take it to your agent, and off you go! **Pg 63**



## Mini Guides

A hugely practical set of guides to cities or regions for you to tear out, fold and keep in your bag. Each Mini Guide contains a detailed map, hotel and restaurant listings, a slice of things to do and see, plus other useful info (Indian embassies abroad, currency, vegetarian-friendly restaurants, etc). **Pg 119**

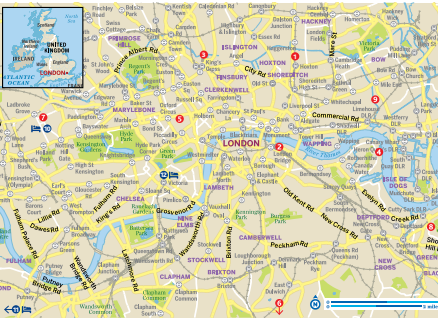


# KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

## MINI GUIDE

Small Museums of London, the UK

### Getting around



### Essentials

**GETTING THERE**  
A number of major international airlines fly from Indian metros to London's Heathrow Airport. British Airways, Jet Airways and Air India fly non-stop from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹47,500).

**THE COST**  
LOW

**DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL**  
LOW

**WHEN TO GO**  
Winters – November to February – are wet, snowy and cold, while summers – April to September – are warmer and drier. You can rely on a sudden drizzle anytime of the year, though.

### Best specialist museums

#### MUSEUM OF BRANDS

This drive-in nostalgia is the brainchild of designer Robert Opie, who has amassed advert memorabilia and packaging since the age of 16. Look out for early Monopoly sets, the debut of Mickey Mouse and a primitive Cledo set (museumofbrands.com; 2, Colville Mews, Lonsdale Rd, 10am–6pm Tues–Sat, 11am–5pm Sun, ₹700).



Yesterday's store copiers at the Museum of Brands

**FAN MUSEUM**  
This wonderful collection of fans includes ivory, tortoiseshell, peacock-feather and kitschy battery-powered versions. The Georgian townhouse setting in Greenwich also has a Japanese garden, plus the Orangery, with lovely trompe-l'œil murals and afternoon tea (thefanmuseum.org.uk; 12, Croome Hill, 11am–5pm Tues–Sat, from 12pm Sun, ₹380).

#### RAGGED SCHOOL MUSEUM

This is a charming combination of mock Victorian schoolroom, re-created East End kitchen and social history museum. Take your

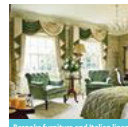
seat for a lesson in which 'pupils' are taught by a strict school ma'am in full Victorian regalia (raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk; 46–50, Crockerfield Rd, 10am–5pm Wed & Thurs, 2pm–5pm, Victorian lessons on first Sun of the month, free).

#### Fancy a curry?

Spice of India offers flavourful curries and authentic Indian food, as well as a range of excellent wines and beverages (00-44-20-7262-5603; spiceofindia.co.uk; 12a, Bathurst St, Lancaster Gate, mains from ₹300).

### Sleep

Notting Hill's **Portobello Court** has several small doubles, a suite with open-hearth fireplace, and a studio with exclusive access to the roof terrace complete with a putting green (portobellocourt.com; reservation@portobellocourt.com; 35–37, Portobello Rd, from ₹7,100).



Portobello Court and its terrace

**The Bingham** is a riverside Georgian townhouse near Richmond with 15 Art-Deco-inspired rooms. There's an excellent restaurant and lounge bar with some irresistible cocktails (thebingham.co.uk; 61–63, Petersham Rd, from ₹12,300).

#### Clustering with chandeliers

dotted with trademark fluffy sheep and overseen by highly-trained staff, the **Goring** in Belgrave is a supremely grand, albeit highly relaxed, slice of England (thegoring.com; reception@thegoring.com; 15, Beeston Pl, from ₹35,000).

### Visa

The UK Border Agency issues short-term tourist visas, single or multiple entries, for up to six months, which cost ₹8,300 through VFS. The processing time is between two and 15 working days, appointments need to be scheduled by email with VFS (ukindia.vfs.gov.uk; vfs-uk-in.com).

### Embassy alert

High Commission of India, London (hcoindia.org.uk; hcoindia.org.uk)

## Essentials

### BEST TIME TO VISIT

They say it's always raining somewhere in Sri Lanka. The east coast's dry from April to October, and the west coast's dry from November to March. The south coast is just right for sunbathers and swimmers.

### GETTING THERE

India, Lanka, Sri Lanka Airlines and Air India fly to Colombo from most Indian metros (return fares from ₹2,840 from Chennai). Train services from Colombo to Jaffna recently got back on track – your railway goes for timetables and reservations (railways.lanka.lk).

### GETTING AROUND

Public transport is a vague concept here. Rickshaws are available in Colombo, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Jaffna. Hiring a car and driver is your best bet. We travelled with Winimal Holidays (00-94-77-44-6679; lanka@winimal.com; from ₹1,000/day).

### VISA

Apply online for an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) before you travel. It will cost you ₹350 for a tourist visa valid for 30 days, and takes around 24 hours to process (more details at eta.gov.lk).

### EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of Sri Lanka, London (00-44-20-7262-5603; embassylanka.org.uk; 12a, Bathurst St, Lancaster Gate, mains from ₹300).

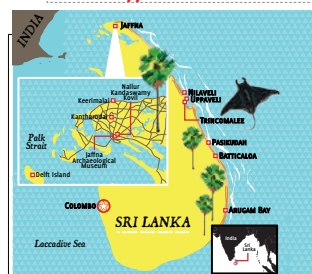
### CURRENCY

1 = 5 Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR)

### FURTHER READING

For more info on Sri Lanka, visit [www.srilanka.lk](http://www.srilanka.lk) and the official tourism website, [www.srilanka.lk](http://www.srilanka.lk). Read *The Island* (Lanka's national newspaper) from the Sri Lanka Mail. For a gripping account of the civil war, watch *No Five Stars* (The Film Society of Sri Lanka, a documentary about the war, available on YouTube). Try and get rid of any extra ears and noses you may have at the **Keemimal Natural Springs** (20km from Batticaloa; 6pm–10pm) and walk through Jaffna's eerie **Dutch Fort** (10am–5pm). If you have a day to while away, spend it on **Delft Island**. Take the ferry from the Pukkudativu pier (leaves Jaffna; 8am, leaves Delft Island; 2:30pm; ₹10 one-way) and request Father David to take you around.

## Make it Happen: North-East Sri Lanka



### SUGGESTED ITINERARY

**Days 1–3** Get an early morning flight into Colombo and drive straight to Jaffna (400km) via Anuradhapura (200km). Stop at **Mango Mang** here for a large, filling lunch of chicken curry-rice and poppadums (00-94-25-222-7501; jayanthi@mangomango.lk; 00-94-77-11513/32; fresh fish from 7am to 8am).

**Days 4–6** Drive down to Trincomalee (200km) and check into **Chaaya Blu** Trincomalee (00-94-26-222-2302; camanahetti.com; Upwail, from ₹1,450). Stroll through **Fort Frederick** and go up to **Koneswaram Kovil** temple and **Swami Rock** for the views (8:30am–5pm).

Come sunset, walk into one of the sheds for dinner. The Crab at Chaaya Blu does an incomparable coconut-flavoured Jaffna king crab curry with fragrant jaggery rice that's ample for two, and refreshing pine coladas (10am–12am; crab curry ₹1,100; cocktails from ₹260). Spend a morning diving and snorkelling the clear waters of **Pigeon Island National Park** with Pigeon Island Diving Station (00-94-9770200; diving@pigeonisland.lk; Pigeon Island View Guest House; 9th Mile Post, Nilaveli, Pigeon Island National Park; 6am–6pm; entry ₹1,000; dolphin watching ₹2,100/four–five people, snorkelling ₹2,500 with gear; entry and boat ride, Discover Soaka Diving ₹5,600/two dives, certified diver ₹2,500/single dive), and fit in a morning boat ride to spot those frolicking dolphins before you leave.

**Days 7–9** Drive to **Paikudah** (108km), and late the evening at the beach, updating the innumerable shallow waters here. Stay at **Amaya Beach**. Snored on the beach, with a great pool, it has chic, comfortable rooms (reservations 00-94-11-476-7888; email: 00-94-45-205-0200; amayabeach.com; Paikudah Rd from ₹7,500 with breakfast). Spend a morning sailing and snorkelling with **Sail Lanka** (00-94-77-188-573; sail-lanka-charter.com; 9am–12pm, 2pm–6pm; from ₹1,200). Head to **Batticaloa** the next day (30km), in time for a scrumptious breakfast of ghee-smothered masala dosa at **Batticaloa's temple** (00-94-45-492-6802; theosai.com; ₹55) before you set out with **East N' West** on board to cycle past Batt's lagoons (00-94-45-222-6078; eastwestonboard.com; 31, Lake Rd, Sinna Upgoda; ₹1,450/person for tour and meal). Stop for a bit of toddy, and learn the ways of the local fishermen, finishing with a simple, delicious meal at a local home.

**Days 10–12** Drive to **Argam Bay** (45km). You can do plenty or absolutely nothing here. Spend an afternoon exploring mangroves and viewing at lone elephants in the **Pettit Lagoon** (around 100,000 people with rickshaws ride) and set aside a day or two for **surfing lessons** (6:30am–4:30pm; around ₹1,200/hour) – every guesthouse worth its salt can organise both for you. Stay at the tasteful and very charming **Midway Resort** (00-94-77-459-6670; midwayresort.com; Ulu, from ₹5,000). Spend your time eating your way through the beach shacks and restaurants lining Argam's only road – **Kottar** is at all Restaurants (00-94-77-312-1484; Main Rd, chicken kottar; ₹95), breakfasts at **Samantha's Folly** (00-94-77-338-7808; samanthasfolly.com; Akala Rd; 6:30am–10pm; shakshuka; ₹235, papaya boat; ₹235, breakfast from ₹165), finger-licking good pizzas and desserts at **The Seahorse Inn's** cosy garden restaurant (00-94-77-172-2364; seahorselinn.com; 44, Panama Rd, breakfast 8am–11pm, dinner 6pm–10pm; pizzas from ₹275), brilliant coffee at the laidback **Midway Blue Cafe**, at **Midway Resort** (7:30am–3:30pm; from ₹140).

**Day 13** Drive to **Colombo** for your flight home (300km), with a stop at **Udawalawe Elephant Orphanage** (feeding times: 8am, 12pm, 3pm, 6pm; ₹235 adult, ₹120 child). **OPTIONAL EXTENSION:** Yala National Park, which boasts one of the highest leopard densities in Asia is 170km from Argam Bay. Stay at **Jesvinga Villa** (00-94-41-2345707; jesvinga.com; 00-94-41-2345707; jesvinga.com/jesvinga2; Next to Tusalam farm, 4km from Yala National Park, Tusalam farm; 11,200).

## Also in the Magazine

**1 Fancy a Curry:** Though Indians love sampling local cuisine while travelling abroad, we tend to miss our *dal-roti* on long-haul holidays. Our international Features and foreign Mini Guides have an Indian (or Indian tastebud-friendly) restaurant suggestion to give you your curry fix.

**2 Veg Out:** You need no longer starve on foreign shores (though don't trash those travel *theplas* yet!). Our international Features and foreign Mini Guides usually feature a vegetarian restaurant or at least one that offers veg fare.

**3 Embassy Alert:** The contact details of the Indian embassy or consulate to help you get that duplicate passport or emergency aid in another country.

**4 Ways To Do It:** Our Make It Happen section has relevant information for hotels, restaurants, shopping and sights across a range of prices: budget, mid-range and luxury. All room rates, unless otherwise stated, are on a double-occupancy basis.

**5 Currency:** All our international Features carry a quick guide to the currency used at your destination, while the Make It Happen sections include prices converted to Indian rupees at the time of going to press.

**6 Best time to visit:** Our Make It Happen sections let you know when the ideal time to visit is.

## ALSO IN THE MAGAZINE

**Festivals:** Our stories signpost upcoming festivals and seasonal events at your destinations (like the Chinese New Year celebrations in Hong Kong).

**Family-friendly options:** Some of our features also carry boxes on baby-sitting facilities, child-safe hotels, where to take potty breaks, and kids' activities.

**Local recommendations:** We try to give you as much local flavour as possible by listing local favourites and hidden non-touristy spots.

## Make this your magazine

Whether you've got a travel question or want to show off your stunning photos or insider knowledge of a destination, get in touch at [lpmagazine@wmm.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@wmm.co.in).



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# Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN







**NEW YORK CITY, USA**

**Flash of inspiration**

On our last night in NYC, we thought we'd visit the Rockefeller Center for what many had said was the best view. We came out of the lift to find the top surrounded by cloud. We could see nothing, and thunder and lightning were going off all around us. When the weather cleared, we headed to the viewing platform to see a stunning lightning show heading away to the south of Staten Island. I decided to switch off the flash on my camera and try my luck. It must only have been my fourth or fifth shot when I captured this strike directly behind the Empire State Building. I got such a huge buzz from the photo, and it was an amazing way to end my first experience of NYC.



**Mike Cutting** was in New York City for 10 days with his partner Jen for a family wedding.

The Empire State Building, although missed on this occasion, is hit by lightning an average of 25 times each year





Dar es Salaam was the capital of Tanzania up until 1974, when it ceded its position to Dodoma

## DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

### Slipway to heaven

I worked in Dar es Salaam for a few years. During my time there, I would spend my days off at Slipway, where the Indian Ocean creates a huge lagoon. One can see the *dhow*s going out early in the morning to fish and making their way back with the setting sun. I took this shot on one such evening when the sun turned the ocean to molten gold and the last *dhow* was returning.



**Abhijit Bose** lives in Mumbai and enjoys landscape, wildlife and travel photography.

## JAMNAGAR, GUJARAT

### What'choo looking at?

Jamnagar is the winter home for many migratory birds, including the demoiselle cranes that fly all the way from Central Asia, crossing the mighty Himalayas. In January, Jamnagar is full of flamingos and demoiselle cranes. I visited a village pond dotted with cranes and spent a pleasant afternoon photographing these beautiful winter guests.



**Sanjay Podder** is a wildlife enthusiast and a regular Postcards contributor.



The demoiselle crane was so named by Queen Marie Antoinette of France for its dainty, ladylike appearance





The elephant's trunk has over 1,00,000 muscles. Asiatic elephants have a finger-like appendage on the ends of their trunks that they can use to grab small items

## JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK, UTTARAKHAND **Baby steps**

I was in the Dhikala grasslands of the Jim Corbett National Park, and I saw a herd of elephants grazing on the banks of the Ramganga River. My attention was drawn to this mother, who kept her calf isolated to avoid injuries. The naughty calf kept playing as the mother grazed. I caught a moment when the calf stepped in between its mother's front legs. The careful mother immediately locked her feet to avoid trampling her baby.



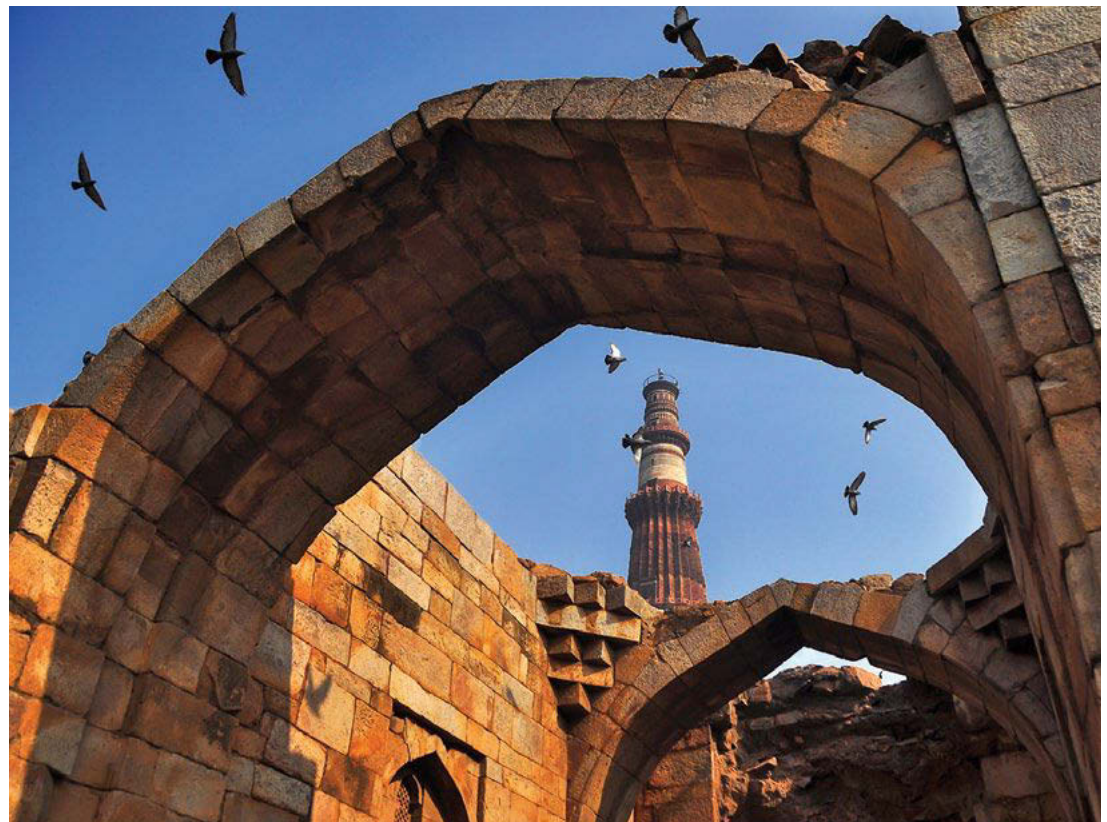
Conservationist and photographer **Raj Krishnani** passionately works towards saving the tiger.

## NEW DELHI, NCR **Standing tall**

It is not known whether the Qutb Minar, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is named after Qutbuddin Aibak or Qutbuddin Bhakiyar Kaki, a famous Sufi saint. The tower was to serve as a minaret from where the *azan*, or prayers, could be called. When I saw the sunlight form a golden blanket on the textured walls and the shadows playing on the wall, with the minaret emerging in the background, I couldn't help but take a photo. It gives me a sense of freedom and piety.



**Mainak Mitra** is a photographer with a great appetite for travel.



One of the theories behind the Qutb Minar's origins states that it was built to signal the beginning of Muslim rule in India





The largest of the wild asses, *kiangs* move with unexpected grace across the grasslands of the Tibetan plateau

## LADAKH, JAMMU & KASHMIR **Kiang Kong**

Travelling is my drug of choice and I'm addicted to it. On a recent trip to Ladakh, on the way from Tsokar, I was trying to capture the beautiful landscape from a moving car when I spotted these gorgeous *kiangs* (wild asses). Their noble presence added to the untouched splendour of this mountainous region, and I couldn't resist taking a quick photo. This, to me, looks like a postcard from heaven!



**Ruby Aderbad** works with an MNC in Mumbai and is an avid traveller who likes to digitally capture memories.

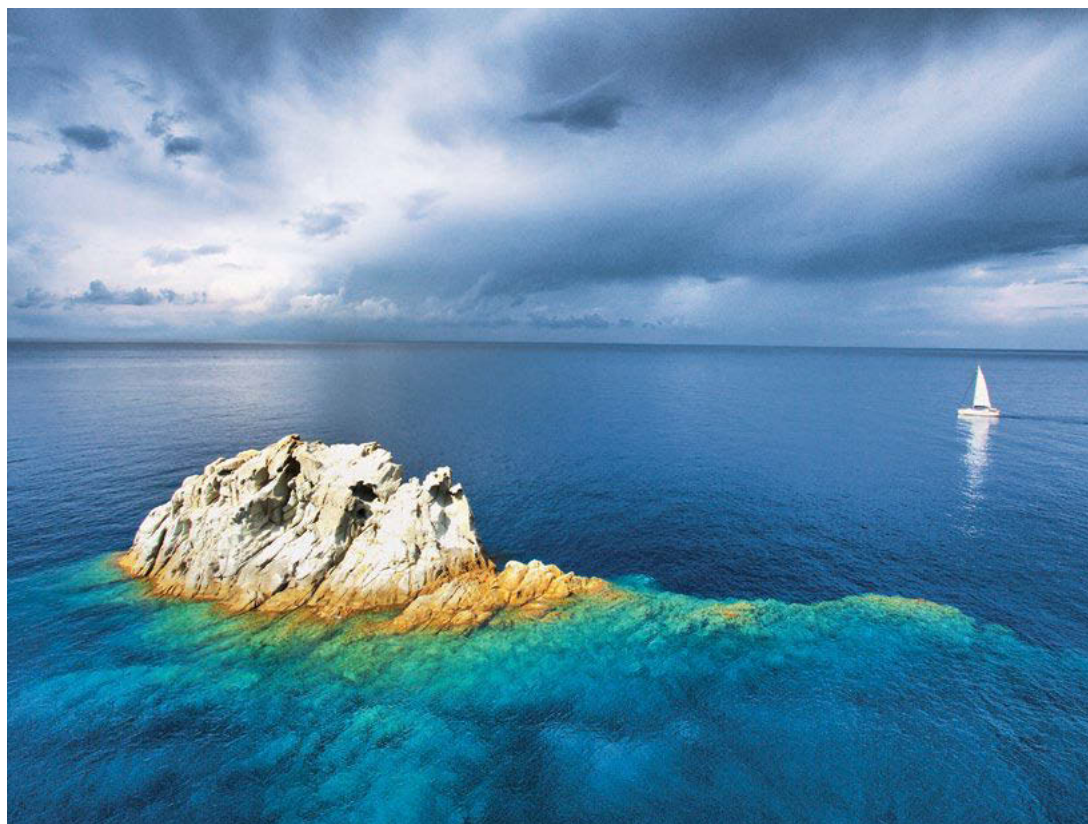
## ELBA ISLAND, ITALY

### **Sailing the rock**

I have always been fascinated by Elba Island, off the coast of Tuscany, because of its most famous prisoner, Napoléon. The varied geography here makes for some picturesque views. At the end of our hike in the Capo d'Enfola National Park, I came across this stunning scene. The sun had just broken out of the clouds, illuminating this rock and the water around it. The sailboat in the background was just the icing on a delicious photo.



When he isn't working, Seattle-based **Bharat Ranjan** indulges his twin passions of travel and photography.



Even while on exile on Elba, Napoleon was given sovereignty over the island and was allowed to keep his title of 'Emperor'





Turbans were originally used by nomads as a multipurpose cloth – it can be used as a pillow, a towel, a blanket, and as a sieve to filter muddy water to drink



**PUSHKAR, RAJASTHAN**

## Head hunter

The Pushkar Camel Fair is a riot of colours and, well... camels. While wandering through the crowds of dromedaries, this frame particularly caught my eye. A trader was standing thoughtfully in the middle of his herd and my eye was drawn to his colourful turban against the dun landscape.



Ankita Hazra travelled to Pushkar to photograph the fair.





Bihu is celebrated in three parts – Bohag Bihu in mid-April, Kongali or Kati Bihu in mid-October and Bhogali Bihu in mid-January

## BONGAIGAON, ASSAM

### Silence of the lamps

The festival of Kati Bihu is celebrated in Assam when the crops are growing. In the evening, offerings are made to the *tulsi* plant in the courtyard, the granary, the farm equipment and paddy field with a special kind of traditional lamp made from elephant apple (*ouu shaki* in Assamese). Farmers light the *ouu shaki* on a stick over their paddy plants and chant mantras to ask for a bountiful yield.



Sadiqur Rehman lives in Assam and is passionate about photographing people

## LADAKH, JAMMU & KASHMIR

### Lonely goat herd

We had gone to Leh in March. It was still very cold and the whole of Leh was brown and dry without a speck of green showing. We wondered how the local livestock managed food in the cold winter months. On our way to Pangong Lake, we came across a flock of pashmina goats, grazing on the brown, dry grass and we were surprised by their hardiness and resilience.



Renu Rajguru is an ENT specialist with the Indian Air Force.



Noori was the first pashmina goat to be cloned at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences in Kashmir





The length of the tail of the male white-rumped shama often determines the size of its territory. Birds with longer tails usually command larger territories

## MAYURBHANJ, ORISSA

### Traction control

I found this white-rumped shama at the Kuldiha National Park, a part of the Simlipal National Park in Orissa. I was there to photograph the Asian paradise flycatcher but I saw this bird just as I entered the park. I camouflaged myself in the vegetation to capture this image.



**Mithun Basak** is a designer by profession but wildlife photography is his passion.

## DARJEELING, WEST BENGAL

### Pearls before swine

I took this picture during my trek to Singalila National Park, Darjeeling. The man in the picture is a trekking guide in the Singalila region of the Himalayas, but guiding is not a steady source of income. To supplement his earnings, he started a pig farm by taking a micro-loan from the bank. Pork is a staple in this part of the Himalayas, and there's good money in it.



**Sirsendu Gayen** is an assistant professor of chemistry at Vivekananda College, Kolkata.



Domestic pigs are omnivores, and there have been instances of them eating humans



# Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



BAVARIA, GERMANY

## Beauty in insanity

**What worked:** While holidaying with my family in Germany last summer, we visited the famous Schloss Neuschwanstein in Bavaria. A spectacular, towering Romanesque Revival citadel, it's sited at the alpine foothills near the Austrian border. If legends and myths intrigue you, Neuschwanstein is a must-visit. Commissioned by oddball King Ludwig, it features swan-themed murals inspired by composer Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*. We were enchanted by the panoramic views of Schloss Hohenschwangau – the king's childhood residence – with the pristine Alpsee and Schwansee lakes in the background. The interiors of the castle, including the bedchambers and throne room, are very well preserved in their original grandeur. Words cannot describe the beauty that makes Neuschwanstein a 'real' fairytale castle.

**What didn't:** Hiking to the castle took us 40 minutes since transport is unscheduled. Photography isn't allowed inside the castle.

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

00-49-83-6293-9880; [www.neuschwanstein.de](http://www.neuschwanstein.de); check website for timings; from ₹ 1,000 adult, from ₹ 900 child, check online for deals



Mumbai-based **Roshni Victorina Dloemen** loves travels and culture and recommends a visit to Schloss Neuschwanstein in Bavaria.



DELOS, GREECE

## The birthplace of Apollo

**What worked:** We took a ferry from Mykonos port for a half-day trip to the island of Delos to explore the glorious ancient Greek civilisation. Many adjectives have been used to describe this beautiful island on the Aegean Sea. According to legend, it was in Delos that Leto gave birth to Apollo and his sister Artemis, and it was due to this dual divine birth that the island acquired its sanctity. The excavations on the island are among the most extensive in the Mediterranean. A large city of about 30,000 inhabitants grew around the sanctuary of Apollo in the Hellenistic period. In 478 BCE, it became the centre of the Delian League – it hosts many antiquities from Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods. Apart from its religious significance, Delos was also very important on the economic front due to its location and the expansion of its commercial port.

**What didn't:** There's only one coffee shop near the museum, so you need to carry your own water.

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

Wear comfortable shoes, carry water and an umbrella, as the only way to see this island is on foot. Ferry services are available from Mykonos port to Delos (ferry from ₹ 1,240, guide from ₹ 700).



Sohini Paul from Kolkata recommends a half-day trip Delos in Greece.

## This page belongs To YOU

### WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

## Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

**PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW OR SUGGEST**

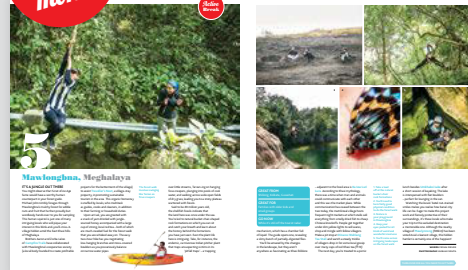
**Mail in your reviews and suggestions to [lpmagazine@www.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@www.co.in)**



# Letters

Here are your reactions and responses to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*: thank you!

Letter of the month



## A boon for homemakers

Although *Lonely Planet Magazine India* is a travel publication, it would be unfair to limit it only to that genre. Besides giving us a sneak peek into various destinations, it provides a huge amount of vital information about our planet in an interesting manner. The younger generation can avail of such information through the Internet, using smartphones, laptops and iPads. However,

for me, the easiest way of expanding my knowledge is newspapers, magazines or the television. Thus, *LPMI* is a boon for homemakers. I enjoyed reading about Orkney's pre-wedding tradition of blackening, and about flamenco, the breathtaking dance form of Spain, and the Tarzan-like trek through Mawlongbna, Meghalaya. I would like to appeal to all my fellow homemakers to subscribe to *LPMI* instead of reading women's magazines so that they, too, can increase their awareness of the world.

– Padma Jagdish, New Delhi

## Congratulations!



When I first saw the classy and colourful cover of your February 2015 issue (*The Hot List*), I knew that it was going to be fabulous and it didn't disappoint. It makes me feel very proud to be a subscriber of the

magazine. Congratulations on turning five this year. Many of the destinations that I wish to visit were covered in the February issue. The redesign looks amazing too. I wish Vardhan Kondvikar and Team *LPMI* lots of success.

– Satej K, Mumbai

## High five!

A high five for *Lonely Planet Magazine India* for turning five this February. I remember the time I got a call from a gentleman from the Times of India Bengaluru office, asking me if I'd like to subscribe to *LPMI*. I was offered a 50 per cent discount on the cover price, as the inaugural price was ₹ 100. It was a dream offer and I'm so glad I took it up. Bringing us the world on a platter, the magazine has become my traveling companion. It has lived up to its credo of "providing trusted, independent travel advice and information." It has also brought us hidden golden nuggets, in the form of stories with stunning photographs, from every nook and corner of our culturally-rich country. Among the array of articles and photographs in the fifth

anniversary issue (*February 2015*), the one I was touched by most was The Photo Story by Simon Urwin (*'The Tile-maker of Herat'*). It's people like Omid Karimi who are keeping the rich artistic and cultural traditions of battle-torn Afghanistan alive. May their tribe increase! I also wish you many more years of bringing us the world on a platter.

– Sharath Ahuja, Bengaluru

## Armchair travel



Thanks to the March 2015 issue of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, I saw the Indian flag unfurling in Scotland at a boutique hotel in Orkney (*The Photo Story*). It was heart-warming; as was the sight of rolling greens flanked by hills on the archipelago. As I was falling in love with my sojourn there, I was transported to Lakshman Sagar in Rajasthan (*5 Easy Trips*) after a brief stopover at Laos (*Country at a Glance*). The lovely Rajasthani hospitality, the rock-cut swimming pool coupled with kebabs served around a bonfire, connected me to the place. Then came the features, Interlaken, which seemed like a surreal holiday, especially Sigriswil. And then

Thailand came along, which opened up places I had not heard of. A quick detour to Goa and the whole image of the state changed for me. It was imperative then to learn about Portugal, which has now moved right to the top of my must-visit list. I never knew being an armchair traveller could be such a fun and enriching experience. Thanks *LPMI* for laying the world on my lap, fueling my imagination.

– Sahil Banga, New Delhi/ Dubai

## Serendipity

On a hot and humid evening, I was browsing in a crowded bookstore, trying to find a book to complete a college project when I stumbled across your March 2015 issue. I'd never read the magazine before, and first impressions, as they say, are often, the last. My verdict? Your magazine is really good. I read every page with a mixture of awe and delight. My college project was on travel and how it broadens the mind and your magazine had so much material in it. It served as a complete guide for my project – it had everything I wanted to know about travel. I enjoyed the articles on Goa, Interlaken, Meghalaya and, especially the cute little Mini Guides. I completed my project in record time and even got praised for it. And I owe a big part of my success to you. As they say, some accidents change your life.

– Belinda Braganza, Mumbai

## DUST WALLET, TROOPER TRAVEL POUCH, EYE GLASS COVER, STORM CARD HOLDER

Engineered from water-repellent waxed canvas and genuine Oil Pull Up leather trim, the rugged Outback Collection from Viari is an adventure seeker's delight. The vintage Dust Wallet keeps your money safe while the Storm Card Holder protects your cards. The Eye Glass Cover protects your sunglasses or spectacles from dust and rain. The well-organised Trooper Travel Pouch, on the other hand, fits your toiletries with ease. For more details on the Outback collection, log on to [viari.in](http://viari.in)

The writer of this issue's Letter of the Month wins this Viari Dust wallet, Trooper Travel Pouch, Eye Glass Cover and Storm Card Holder in khaki shade.

To write in to the magazine, email us at [lpmagazine@www.co.in](mailto:lpmagazine@www.co.in)



LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR CLARITY OR LENGTH



# AND FOR THAT ONE MOMENT YOU ARE ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE.



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**W**ELCOME to this year's Lonely Planet Magazine India Travel Awards. Like last year, the Blue Balloon trophy will go to the destinations and hotels that went the extra mile to help you make the most of your holiday. We, at *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, know that you really experience travel – get under the skin of a place, learn a little, and take away something you'll remember forever. But to make your trips (and our job) a little easier, we've asked a panel of travel experts (*see below*) for nominations in each category. So, over the next few pages, we invite you to help us pick your favourite destinations and hotels. Thank you in advance for helping us make these awards the hit that they are. Together, let's make the exciting world of travel even better.



## HOW TO VOTE

- In each category, we have listed the nominees. This year – **apart from where mentioned** – there are no open-ended questions. Please select the winners from among the nominees only.
- Please nominate only **one** contender in every category; if you mark more than one, your vote for that entire category will be discounted.
- The voting should be based on **your** experiences, not on hearsay or the number of awards or accolades a destination has received from other sources. This applies to all awards except 'Favourite Destination' and 'Emerging Destination', where you are allowed to vote for a dream destination, even if you haven't visited it yourself.
- In some categories, we've listed a particular part of a country, and in some, the entire country. This is to make it easier for you to relate to the question: for example, you'd think of Paris as a great shopping destination, but you might not necessarily think the same of France as a whole.

## OUR EXPERT PANEL



**VARDHAN KONDIKAR**

Editor, Lonely Planet Magazine India

A travel and automobile journalist, Vardhan made the perfectly sensible decision of moving from driving fast cars to sitting with women on exotic beaches and pretending to write serious travel stories.



**VEENA PATIL**

Managing Director, Veena World

Known in the travel industry for her creative mind, Veena expanded the family business by launching tours for women, senior citizens and students, as well as spiritual tours, and new divisions. She's also a prolific writer and columnist.



**MANU KASHYAP**

Director, Windmill Holidays

In the travel industry for the past 15 years, Manu started her boutique holiday company four years ago to help travellers with tailor-made itineraries.



**SUCHETA POTNIS & HANS TUINMAN**

Founders, *travellerspalm.com*

Dutchman Hans, who has done his thesis on India's untouchables, and Sucheta, the first Indian woman to lead foreign tourists on a camel safari across the Thar, have been organising inbound tours around India for over 30 years.



**MADHAVAN MENON**

Managing Director, Thomas Cook India Ltd

Madhavan has experience of over 34 years in fields like banking, finance and travel-related foreign exchange management, and has been MD of Thomas Cook since 2006.



**DEEP KALRA**

CEO, *makemytrip.com*

The founder of makemytrip.com is also a founding member of 'I am Gurgaon', an NGO focused on improving the quality of life in Gurgaon. His other interests include swimming, quizzing, adventure sports and, of course, travelling.



## DESTINATION AWARDS

In many categories, we have split the contenders into domestic and international ones – but India occasionally *does* show up in the international category, too.

### 1. BEST DESTINATION FOR CULTURE

The destination that showcases local culture most effectively, and gives you access to its people, history, art, architecture and traditions in the best way possible

INTERNATIONAL			
Italy	<input type="checkbox"/>	China	<input type="checkbox"/>
India	<input type="checkbox"/>	The UK	<input type="checkbox"/>
Japan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Spain	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gujarat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikkim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Punjab	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chhattisgarh	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 2. BEST DESTINATION FOR ADVENTURE

The destination that offers the most scope for organised adventure sports, hiking, trekking, diving, etc, and which makes these activities accessible while merging them into the natural or cultural environment – and has the proper infrastructure for doing all these things safely

INTERNATIONAL			
New Zealand	<input type="checkbox"/>	Australia	<input type="checkbox"/>
South Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Malaysia	<input type="checkbox"/>
Switzerland	<input type="checkbox"/>	USA	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Himachal Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jammu & Kashmir	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uttarakhand	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meghalaya	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 3. BEST DESTINATION FOR WILDLIFE

The destination whose goal is to build an appreciation for wildlife, and has a wide variety of wildlife (and easy access to it). It's also important that the destination treats its wildlife with care and respect

INTERNATIONAL			
South Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Australia	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kenya	<input type="checkbox"/>	Brazil	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tanzania	<input type="checkbox"/>	India	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Madhya Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kaziranga, Assam	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gujarat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jammu & Kashmir	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 4. BEST FAMILY DESTINATION

The destination that makes it as easy and convenient as possible for you to travel with your family, offers lots of attractions, activities and sensibly-priced accommodation and dining options, as well as has a local culture that's friendly and caring towards children and senior citizens

INTERNATIONAL			
Switzerland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singapore	<input type="checkbox"/>
Malaysia	<input type="checkbox"/>	France	<input type="checkbox"/>
The UK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dubai	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uttarakhand	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	Himachal Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikkim	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 5. BEST VALUE DESTINATION

The destination that most consistently offers a high-quality experience at an affordable price (including flights, accommodation, food and drink, activities, etc), while still being a great place to visit, not just a cheap one

INTERNATIONAL			
Thailand	<input type="checkbox"/>	Portugal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sri Lanka	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indonesia	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vietnam	<input type="checkbox"/>	Turkey	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tamil Nadu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gujarat	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 6. BEST DESTINATION FOR RELAXATION

The destination that helps you get away from it all, and offers the best beaches, prettiest hills, sweetest spas or a combination to help you recharge. A great cultural experience is a bonus, of course, but a sense of relaxation, of 'being on holiday', is what we're really looking for here

INTERNATIONAL			
The Seychelles	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sri Lanka	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bali	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thailand	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Maldives	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fiji	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	<input type="checkbox"/>	Puducherry	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Himachal Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uttarakhand	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 7. BEST DESTINATION FOR FOOD/ DRINK

The destination that offers the tastiest and most interesting cuisine and drinks (offering a wide variety of international cuisines is a secondary consideration)

INTERNATIONAL			
Scotland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singapore	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hong Kong	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vietnam	<input type="checkbox"/>
Australia	<input type="checkbox"/>	USA	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
New Delhi, Delhi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mumbai, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangalore, Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Amritsar, Punjab	<input type="checkbox"/>



## 8. BEST SHOPPING DESTINATION

The destination that offers the best shopping centres and best prices, as well as organises shopping festivals, etc, to cater to your need for retail therapy

INTERNATIONAL			
Hong Kong	<input type="checkbox"/>	London	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dubai	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singapore	<input type="checkbox"/>
Malaysia	<input type="checkbox"/>	New York City	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Mumbai, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangalore, Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delhi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kolkata, West Bengal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jaipur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Puducherry	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 9. BEST ROMANTIC DESTINATION

The destination that offers all you need for that perfect honeymoon/ romantic getaway, from atmosphere and culture to stay options and food and drink

INTERNATIONAL			
Paris	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oman	<input type="checkbox"/>
Italy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Switzerland	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Seychelles	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fiji	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Jammu & Kashmir	<input type="checkbox"/>	Himachal Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikkim	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 10. BEST EMERGING DESTINATION

The new destination that has captured your imagination, whether through clever marketing, word of mouth, or simply because it's now possible to go there

INTERNATIONAL			
Sri Lanka	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cuba	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oman	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scandinavia	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mexico	<input type="checkbox"/>	South Korea	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
West Bengal	<input type="checkbox"/>	Manipur	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telangana	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meghalaya	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daman & Diu	<input type="checkbox"/>	Orissa	<input type="checkbox"/>

## HOSPITALITY AWARDS

In many cases, categories will have lots of price variations: eg wildlife resorts can be simple, rustic tented camps, or expensive, luxurious bungalows in the forest, or anything in between. We want to know where you feel most like you're getting what you're paying for, and whether you actually have the experience you're looking for when you use that service.

## 11. BEST STAY FOR RELAXATION

The hotel best geared to helping you relax, providing a fun atmosphere, plenty of facilities and activities (swimming pool, horse-riding) that all members of a family can enjoy, good food and drink and pleasant accommodation in a spot like a beach, island or hill-station

INDIA			
The Leela Kovalam, Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildflower Hall – The Oberoi, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alila Diwa Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ananda in the Himalayas, Uttarakhand	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kumarakom Lake Resort, Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, J & K	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 12. BEST STAY FOR BUSINESS

The city or just-outside-city hotel that best meets your travel needs, providing the best business services (business centre, transport, in-room internet, etc), efficient service, multilingual staff and clean, comfortable rooms. If it helps you feel like you're not on business at all, so much the better

INTERNATIONAL			
Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Stafford London	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong	<input type="checkbox"/>	St Pancras Renaissance London Hotel – Marriott	<input type="checkbox"/>
Andaz 5th Avenue – Hyatt, New York	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Peninsula Shanghai	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
The Leela Palace Chennai, Tamil Nadu	<input type="checkbox"/>	JW Marriott Bengaluru, Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>
ITC Maurya, New Delhi, Delhi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sofitel Mumbai BKC, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>
Palladium Hotel, Mumbai, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata, West Bengal	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 13. BEST STAY FOR WILDLIFE

A property located beside or within a national park, whose primary focus is an appreciation for wildlife. It could be a tented camp or a sprawling series of bungalows, but it's critical that the lodge's architecture blends into the forest, that it provides good facilities for wildlife viewing and interpretation, that it provides good guides and does not promote activities that are illegal or harmful to nature, such as guaranteed tiger sightings

INTERNATIONAL			
MalaMala Main Camp, South Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singita Sabora Tented Camp, Tanzania	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governors' Camp, Masai Mara, Kenya	<input type="checkbox"/>	Belmond Eagle Island Lodge, Botswana	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sanctuary Gorilla Forest Camp, Uganda	<input type="checkbox"/>	Elephant Reach, Yala National Park, Sri Lanka	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Samode Safari Lodge, Bandhavgarh, Madhya Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Oberoi Vanyavilas, Ranthambore, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baghvan – Taj Safaris, Pench, Madhya Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diphlu River Lodge, Kaziranga, Assam	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Bison Resort, Kabini, Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tiger Trails Jungle Lodge, Tadoba, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 14. BEST HOMESTAY

The homestay, small inn or small mansion (under 10 rooms) where you have personal contact with the family that runs it, which gives you both a comfortable stay and lets you connect with the culture of the place through food, architecture, service and décor, and helps you to get to know the region better through excursions or personal contacts

Silver Brook Estate, Coorg, Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>	Capella Homestay, Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Philipkutty's Farm, Kottayam, Kerala	<input type="checkbox"/>	Devra Hotel, Udaipur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maachli, Sindhudurg, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tathagata Farm, Darjeeling, West Bengal	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 15. BEST HERITAGE STAY

This can either be a historic palace, castle, mansion or other structure (like a jail, lighthouse, etc)

INDIA			
Maison Perumal, Puducherry	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Imperial, New Delhi, Delhi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur – Taj, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hotel Udai Bilas Palace, Dungarpur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Samode Haveli, Jaipur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>



**16. BEST STAY FOR LUXURY**

This could be a heritage structure, a newly-built hotel, a castle, palace, mansion, spa hotel or any combination of the above, which has a five-star rating or above

INTERNATIONAL			
Six Senses Zighy Bay, Oman	<input type="checkbox"/>	Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, Switzerland	<input type="checkbox"/>
Çırağan Palace Kempinski, Istanbul	<input type="checkbox"/>	&Beyond Mnemba Island, Zanzibar	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hotel du Vin Glasgow, Scotland	<input type="checkbox"/>	Qualia, Hamilton Island, Australia	<input type="checkbox"/>

INDIA			
Mihir Garh, Jodhpur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra, Uttar Pradesh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rambagh Palace Jaipur – Taj, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coco Shambhala, Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Shakti 360° Leti, Uttarakhand	<input type="checkbox"/>

**17. BEST VALUE STAY**

The budget, mid-range or luxury hotel that you think gives you the most bang for your buck... Basically, the hotel should give you what it promises – including the accommodation, facilities, food, location and service – at a price that works for you.

# WIN A STAY IN ZANZIBAR

Enjoy a three-night luxury stay for two, courtesy **The Zanzibar Collection**

The Zanzibar Collection is a set of three boutique properties on beautiful Bwejuu-Paje Beach in Zanzibar, one of the most exotic beach destinations you could ever hope to see. The stay includes three nights in a private villa at the Baraza Resort & Spa, with access to all the facilities and restaurants at The Palms and Breezes Beach Club next door; Baraza takes you back to the days of the Sultans of Zanzibar, with beautiful brass lanterns, antiques and carved stucco ([thezanzibarcollection.com](http://thezanzibarcollection.com)).

**THE PRIZE**

- A villa for three nights for two (extra nights available)
- Valid for stays between June 2015 and December 2015, (not valid during July, August and the festive season from December 23 to 31, 2015)

## PLEASE COMPLETE THE LPMI TRAVEL AWARDS 2015 FORM AND FILL IN YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS BELOW TO ENTER THE PRIZE DRAW

For a chance to win this fantastic prize, simply fill in your details and post the completed awards form to: **Lonely Planet Magazine India** (LPMI Travel Awards 2015), Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, 4th Floor, Dr D N Road, Mumbai – 400001 before midnight on April 30, 2015.

Title	First name	Surname
Address		
Pin code		
DOB		/ /
Phone number		Email*

\* Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, publisher of Lonely Planet Magazine India, may contact you with details of its products and services offered by Worldwide Media (including Lonely Planet Magazine India) or to undertake research. Please tick here if you would prefer not to receive such information by post, phone or email ☐. Please tick here if you prefer to receive such information by email ☐. We may occasionally pass your details on to carefully selected companies whose products and services we feel may be of interest to you. Please tick this box if you prefer not to receive such information by post, phone or email ☐.

**Prize draw terms and conditions:** 1. This contest is open only to Indian residents and aged 18+. The guest of the winner should also be an Indian resident and also aged 18+. By entering, you agree to these rules. 2. Employees of WWM, its partners related to this promotion, and their relatives and business associates are not eligible to take part in this lucky draw. 3. Entries received after midnight on April 30, 2015, will not be considered and entries won't

INDIA			
Ku Goa Morjim, Goa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bed & Chai Guest House, New Delhi, Delhi	<input type="checkbox"/>
The House of MG, Ahmedabad, Gujarat	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bodhi Tree, Kolkata, West Bengal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Abode, Mumbai, Maharashtra	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dera Rawatsar, Jaipur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>

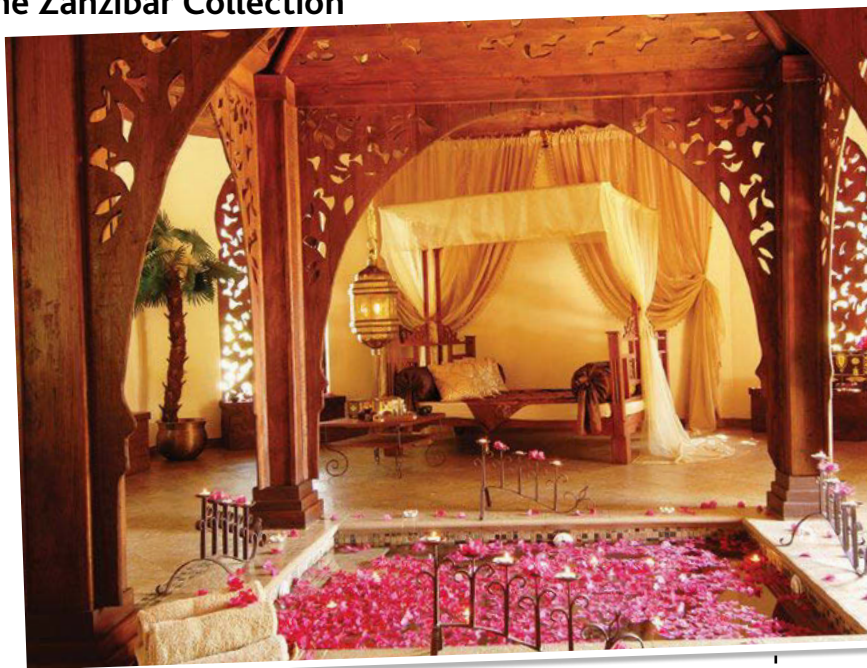
**18. BEST STAY FOR ROMANCE**

A property that lends itself best to finding that lovin' feeling, including ambience, architecture, activities/ amenities, privacy and great food and drink

INDIA			
Hotel Udai Bilas Palace, Dungarpur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Raas, Jodhpur, Rajasthan	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Tamara Coorg, Karnataka	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ri Kynjai - Serenity By The Lake, Shillong, Meghalaya	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dune Eco Village & Spa, Puducherry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mary Budden Estate, Binsar, Uttarakhand	<input type="checkbox"/>

**19. FAVOURITE DESTINATION**

The destination that you have travelled to and would visit again and again, or the destination you've always dreamed of visiting



THE  
**ZANZIBAR**  
COLLECTION

be returned. 4. You must provide your full name, address and daytime phone number. We will use your personal details to administer this promotion, and will not publish them or provide them to anyone without your permission. 5. Only one entry permitted per person. Entries made in bulk or by third parties are prohibited. 6. The winner will be the first correct entry drawn at random after the closing date. If the winner does not claim the prize within one calendar month of the closing date, we will draw again for a new winner. 7. The winner will be announced in the first week of May. 8. The prize is valid between June and December 2015, barring peak season, conventions and black-out periods. 9. The winner of the Lucky Draw shall pay and be responsible for the airfare and airline taxes, Income tax and any other statutory taxes before claiming the prize/ package. The winner of the Lucky Draw shall give the proof of payment of Income tax and any other statutory taxes before claiming the prize/ package. 10. There is no cash alternative and the prize is not transferable. Our decision as to the winner is final. 11. We reserve the right to amend, alter or withdraw the promotion at our discretion. 12. No extension policy of holiday as applicable. 13. Photographs used for representational purposes only.



# Globetrotter

A WORLD OF TRAVEL NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

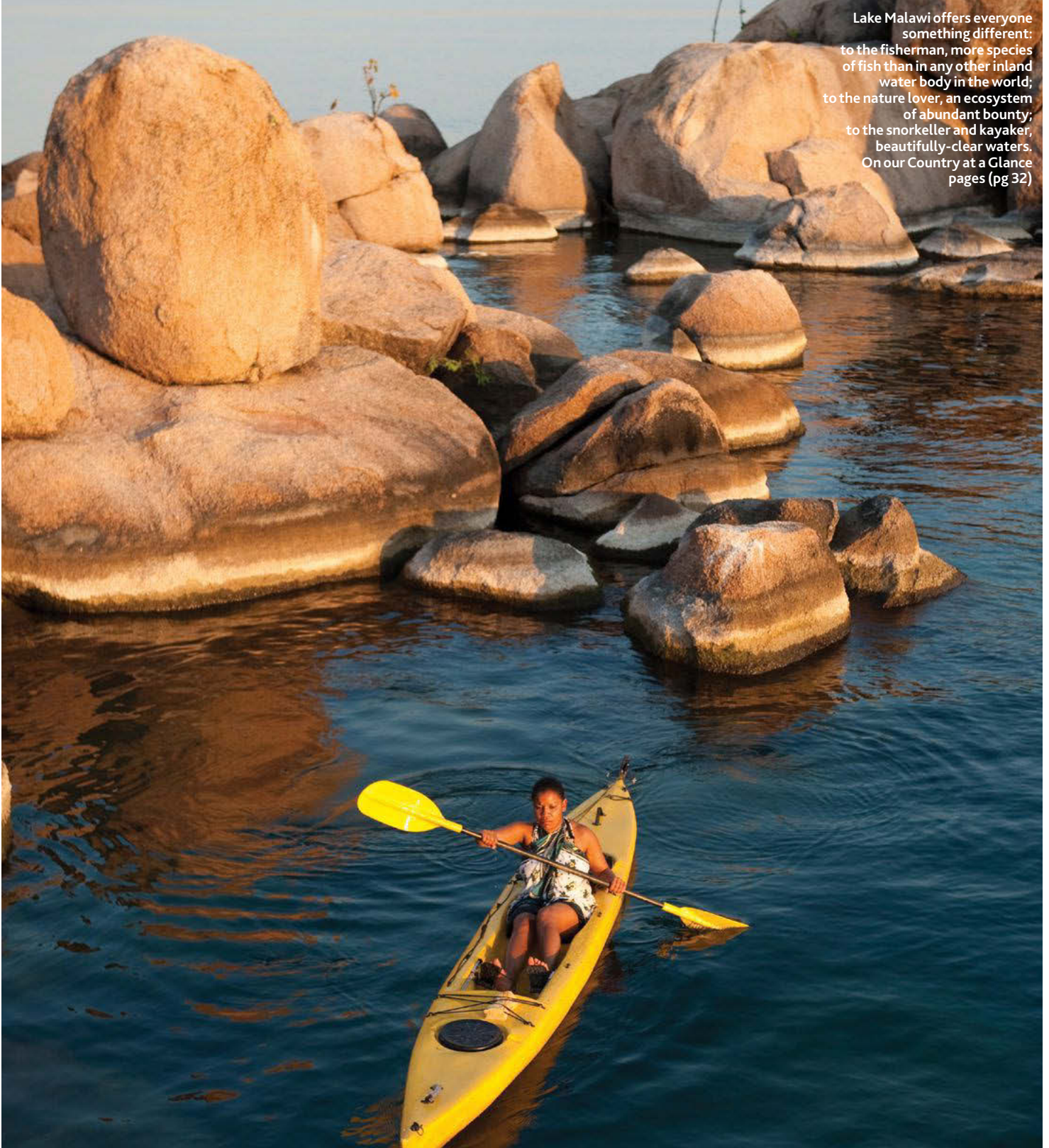
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**PG 32 Country at a Glance:** Known for its lake, friendly people and easy travel, **Malawi** will capture your imagination

**PG 31 World on your Plate:** Deep-fried cylinders of meat, *broodje kroket* from The **Netherlands** are melt-in-the-mouth treats

**PG 41 Anything to Declare:** Tim Parks invites you to travel across **Italy** by train

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A photograph of a person in a yellow kayak on a body of water, surrounded by large, smooth, light-colored rocks. The water is dark blue, and the rocks are illuminated by warm, golden light, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The person is wearing a patterned shirt and shorts, and is holding a yellow paddle.

Lake Malawi offers everyone something different: to the fisherman, more species of fish than in any other inland water body in the world; to the nature lover, an ecosystem of abundant bounty; to the snorkeller and kayaker, beautifully-clear waters. On our Country at a Glance pages (pg 32)









These elephants in Amboseli National Park in Kenya didn't seem concerned with my aircraft, although, at one point, I did hear one trumpeting over the noise of the engine. Flying over them was a bit scary – I knew that if I went down out there, I wouldn't be able to outrun an angry elephant

## The Photo Story

GEORGE STEINMETZ



### A flying visit

Many years ago, I went travelling in Africa – hitchhiking all the way from London to Zaire (now DR Congo). I remember crossing the vastness of the Sahara, when it dawned on me: what would it look like if you could see all of the desert from the air? There would be fantastic patterns in the dunes and eroded *wadis* – if only you could get high enough to see them all. And I remember thinking: wouldn't it be cool if there were an aircraft you could fit in the back of a car, one you could fly whenever you wanted to? Twenty years later, something like that was invented – the motorised paraglider – and I learned to use one. Piloting it can be a bit like sitting in a flying lawn chair. It's the slowest and lightest aircraft in the world, and I have to run with the motor on my back to take off. Sadly, that motor isn't always reliable – I fly such that I can glide to a safe spot on the ground if anything goes wrong. But the wonderful thing about my aircraft is that it has very minimal impact on the ground – you can fly much lower than an airplane, and get close to things without causing a stir. You get a 180° unrestricted view, too. There's nothing between me and what I'm seeing – I don't even wear goggles – so it's a strangely intimate experience. I do feel quite privileged to see the world this way. →

George Steinmetz is an American photographer who often takes pictures of the world's deserts ([georgesteinmetz.com](http://georgesteinmetz.com)). His work features in Lonely Planet's *Beautiful World* (see end of feature for more).





The streets are very narrow in Beni Isguen, Algeria, and no vehicles can pass through. Walking around the town, you'd have no idea that the roofs are open to the sky and that people sleep on them on hot summer nights – from the air, it was a view into a secret world. It looks to me almost like a beehive



Australia's Great Barrier Reef near the Whitsunday Islands, as taken from a helicopter. The picture almost looks like something you'd see through a microscope. I asked a sea plane to fly laps beneath me so I could get some scale into the shot – you can just make it out at four o'clock from the centre of the picture



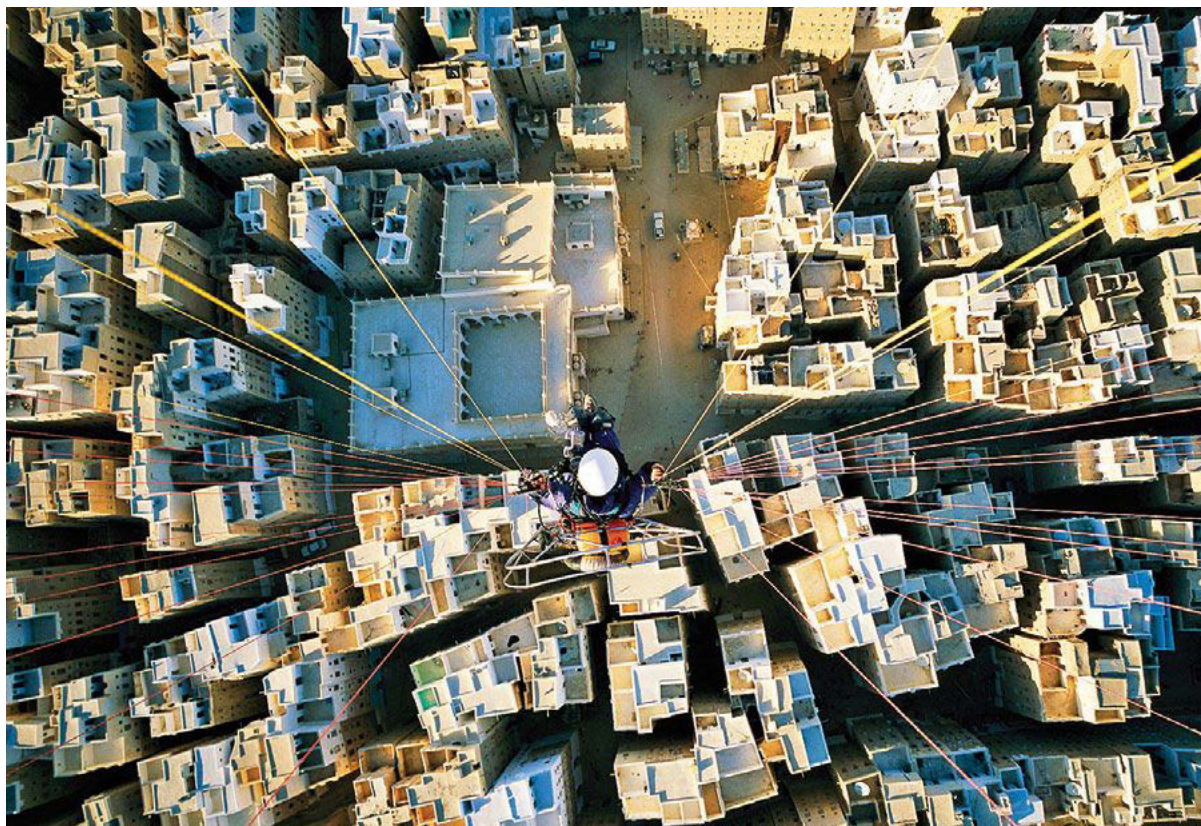


It was rice-harvesting season when I visited Bartaga Village on the banks of the Niger River, Mali; you can see the bundles of rice straw piled up in the compounds. The deep reds of the sand are a sign that the desert surface here is very old – it takes a long time for iron in the sand to oxidise and turn that colour →

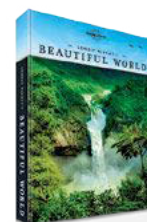




A caravan in the Ténéré Desert, Niger, fetching salt from the oasis of Bilma. The Tuareg people make this 560km trip no more than once a year, otherwise it would kill their camels. You need a year with lots of rain for the camels to be healthy enough to set out on the journey. It is like a biblical scene 📖



George Steinmetz takes his aerial photographs suspended in a motorised paraglider



Published to celebrate Lonely Planet's 40th anniversary, Lonely Planet's *Beautiful World* features pictures of the globe's most extraordinary landscapes, as captured by a selection of accomplished photographers.



World on your Plate

# Broodje Krokiet

The Netherlands

*Broodje krokets* (pronounced bro-tchuh crocket) are deep-fried cylinders of meat, usually served in a sandwich with spicy mustard. The inclusion of *kecap manis* (sweetened soya sauce) is due to the heavy influence of Indonesia, one of The Netherlands' most-prized colonies.



Cover the cooling béchamel sauce with a piece of greaseproof paper to stop it forming a skin

## MAKES 4 KROKETS

### For the béchamel sauce:

25g butter  
25g plain flour  
A pinch freshly-grated nutmeg  
125ml hot milk  
Salt and white pepper to taste

### For the filling:

150g cold roast beef, chopped  
½ small onion, very finely chopped  
A small handful button mushrooms, finely chopped  
1 tsp *kecap manis* (sweetened soya sauce)  
1 tbsp chopped fresh thyme leaves

### For the coating:

Flour  
1 egg, beaten  
Milk  
Fresh breadcrumbs  
Vegetable oil, for deep-frying

1. To make the béchamel sauce, melt the butter in a small, heavy-based saucepan. Add the flour, stirring, to make a smooth *roux* (paste). Keep stirring for several minutes. Mix the grated nutmeg into the milk, then gradually add it to the *roux*, stirring constantly. Bring

gently to a boil, stirring, then simmer for five minutes. Remove from heat, season with salt and white pepper, and allow to cool.

2. Blend all the filling ingredients in a food processor until well combined. Mix with the cooled béchamel sauce and season with salt and white pepper as required. Refrigerate the mixture for a few hours till well chilled, then form into four *krokets*, each 7.5cm long.

3. Sprinkle flour into a plate to cover it. In a separate wide dish, mix the beaten egg with a splash of milk.

Place the breadcrumbs in another plate. Dip each *krokiet* first in the flour, then in the beaten egg mixture, and, finally, in the breadcrumbs to coat all over.

4. Heat vegetable oil in a deep pan. Deep-fry the *krokets* in two batches for about five minutes, turning occasionally, until golden brown. Drain on paper towels.

Keep the cooked *krokets* warm while you cook the second batch.  
5. Serve the warm *krokets* in soft white rolls or hot dog buns with lots of spicy mustard on the side.



## Country at a Glance



# Malawi



**M**ALAWI is dominated by its lake – alternately known as Lake Malawi, Lake Nyasa or Lake of Stars – and by its reputation for friendly people and easy travel. But, step away from the stereotypes and you'll find much more. The country has beautiful and diverse landscapes, ranging from dramatic peaks to rolling grasslands, from hills and waterfalls to a tropical shoreline. Its national parks are home to zebras, impalas, crocodiles, hippos and birds galore. Traditional culture thrives in villages and on the islands in Lake Malawi. Stay for a week or three, relax on the lake, hike in the hills, explore the Nyika Plateau, and – best of all – get to know Malawians. Before long, you'll be hooked.

## TOP THINGS TO SEE

- \* A wealth of birds in the swamplands of **Elephant Marsh**, an ornithologist's paradise
- \* Hundreds of colourful cichlids in the clear waters of **Lake Malawi**
- \* The beaches, the cathedral, the baobabs and the mango trees on lovely **Likoma Island**
- \* Elephants, impalas and buffaloes at **Vwaza Marsh Wildlife reserve**
- \* A performance of *gule wamkulu* or other traditional dances

## TOP THINGS TO DO

- \* Hike or ride a horse past zebras and antelopes in magnificent **Nyika National Park**.

- \* Scale majestic **Mt Mulanje**.
- \* Meander down Lake Malawi on the **Ilala ferry**, Malawi's grande dame of river vessels.
- \* Paddle a dugout canoe along the Lake Malawi shoreline, listening to the calls of fish eagles circling above.
- \* Spot hippos and crocs in the **Shire River** in **Liwonde National Park**.

## GETTING UNDER THE SUN

**Read** *The Rainmaker*, a poetic drama by Steve Chimomba; or Legson Kayira's *The Looming Shadow*, an exploration of conflicts between traditional and modern beliefs.

**Listen** to Lucius Banda's 'Malawian-style' reggae.

**Capital:**  
**Lilongwe**

**Population:**  
**14,268,711**

**Area: 118,484sqkm**

**Official languages:**  
**English & Chichewa**





#### TRADEMARKS

Lake Malawi; carved wooden chief's chair; laid-back beach resorts; friendly locals; tobacco; *Ilala* ferry, wildlife

#### BEST TIME TO VISIT

April/ May to September

#### RANDOM FACT

Malawi is home to over 600 species of birds. There are more fish species (500-plus) in Lake Malawi than in any other inland body of water in the world.

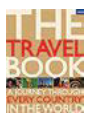


PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES (1-5), © EDWARD J WESTMACOTT / ALAMY (6) MAP: JAYKRISHNAN SUBRAMANIAM

**Watch** *Up in Smoke*, a documentary exploring the effects of the tobacco industry in Malawi.

**Eat** *nsima* (maize meal) and *chambo* (a fish from Lake Malawi).

**Drink** *chibuku* (shake-shake beer), a commercially-produced local brew.



GET MORE: This excerpt is from Lonely Planet's *The Travel Book: Journey through every country in the world*, available through [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com) or at your local bookstore.



1. Lake Malawi is also called Lake Nyasa and the Lake of Stars
2. Malawi is unabashedly colourful
3. Drying fish right out of Lake Malawi
4. Tradition stalks modernity at Lake Malawi National Park in the Great Rift Valley
5. An elephant herd in the Shire River in Liwonde National Park
6. Don't leave without trying *chibuku* ('shake-shake' beer)



10 things to do in...

# Valencia

**1** Take a guided walking tour that not only lets you see the sights, but also soak in 2,000 years of history as you learn about Valencia's Muslim rule, the golden age of trading, the origin of the Las Fallas Festival, and more. The guides are knowledgeable and friendly – they work only for tips, so you know they're giving it their best every time (*tourmeout.com*; 12pm daily from the fountain in Plaza de la Virgen; free).

**2** Grab some sunscreen and a towel and hit the beach! **La Malvarrosa** and **Las Arenas** are both close to the city centre and their golden sands and blue waters are ideal for a swim, a lazy lounge, or a workout at one of

the health parks. Later, walk down the bustling boardwalk for a *paella* and some window-shopping (*visitvalencia.com*; 11am–7pm).

**3** Stroll through the **Jardines del Turia**, a garden complex constructed in the old Rio Turia riverbed after its diversion to prevent flooding. Along this 9km 'River of Culture', you can play sports, scramble, Lilliput-style, over Gulliver's statue, admire the cityscapes, tour through historic museums, gawp at the futuristic City of Arts and Sciences or, simply, relax in the shade of a tree with a book (*visitvalencia.com*; Avenida Manuel de Falla; 10am–8pm, 10am–2pm, 5pm–9pm Jul–Aug; free).



Free



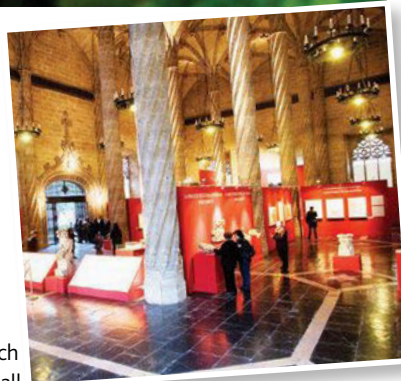
Eat

**9** Grab a stool at the bar and sample from 1,000 local wines, or duck under and enter the small restaurant section for some mind-blowing tapas. Whatever your preference, a visit to the quaint and reasonably-priced **Bodega Casa Montana** is a must. Try the chorizo tapas or the codfish with potatoes (00-34-96-367-2314; *emilianobodega.com*; Carrer de Josep Benlliure; 1pm–4pm, 8pm–11.30pm Mon–Fri, 12.30pm–4pm, 8pm–11.30pm Sat, 12.30pm–4pm Sun; tapas from ₹200).

**10** The only thing that's fixed at the ever-changing **Seu Xerea** is the knowledge that whatever Asian-Spanish fusion dish will be served, it's going to tantalise your tastebuds. With options such as Burmese-style pig with rhubarb, and giant oysters with gin fizz foam, this is a *Masterchef*-style menu just waiting to be tucked into (00-34-96-392-4000; *seuzerea.com/en*; Almodovar, 4; 1.30pm–3.30pm, 8.30pm–11pm Mon–Sat, mains from ₹1,250).

Do

**7** If you'd like to really get a feel of Valencia's historic **Old Quarter**, book a guided tour. Visit Lonja de Seda, the World Heritage Gothic building, which served as the trade hall of Valencia's silk exchange in the 15th century, Mercado Central, one of the oldest running European flea markets and the Marqués de Dos Aguas Palace with its stunning alabaster entrance, among others (*shop.visitvalencia.com*, *vlcshop@turisvalencia.es*; ₹1,175 adult, ₹550 child).



See

**4** Though construction of the **Valencia Cathedral** began in 1262, additions to it continued well into the 18th century, making it an evolving work of art. Don't miss the oils by Francisco Goya and the pièce de résistance – the Holy Grail Jesus allegedly sipped from during The Last Supper (00-34-96-391-8127; *catedraldevalencia.es*; Almoina Square; check website for timings; ₹345 adult, ₹240 child, prices include audio guide).

**5** The **Museo de Bellas Artes** showcases over 2,000 works of art. Highlights include the Impressionist and Baroque paintings by Sorolla, Murillo, Ribalta and other greats along with some extraordinary late-medieval altarpieces (00-34-96-387-0300; *museobellasartesvalencia.gva.es*; C/ San Pío V, nº 9; 11am–5pm Mon, 10am–7pm Tues–Sun; free, guided tours on reservation).

**6** Housed in a cool whale skeleton-like structure, the **Príncipe Felipe Science Museum** is where you can learn about all things scientific in the most interactive and graphic way (00-34-90-210-0031; *cac.es*; check website for timings; ₹550 adult, ₹430 child).



Shop

**8** Don't let the name faze you, the **Colón Market** is a lovely modernist building designed to resemble the awning of a marketplace, enhanced with stained-glass windows and a mosaic of broken tiles at the entrance. It's a great place to while away time over coffee or a *horchata* (a cold drink made from tigernuts) and *fartons* (shortbread) and do a bit of shopping (*mercadocolon.es*; Calles Cirilo Amorós y Jorge Juan; 8am–1.30am).



# WHY GIFT SOMEONE A BOTTLE OF WINE WHEN YOU COULD SEND THEM WHERE IT CAME FROM?

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## LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE GIFT PACK

A GIFT THAT LASTS ALL YEAR LONG





# Arrivals



## HIT THE RAILS

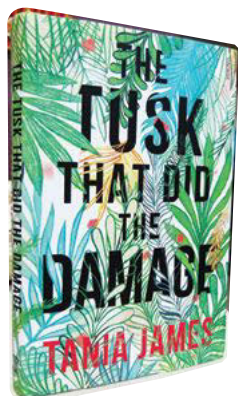
**VIA RAIL CANADA** has further dropped the rates on the **Escape Fare** with the introduction of new economy prices on its famous Toronto – Vancouver route. The fare for Toronto – Sudbury Junction is now CA\$ 48 (approx ₹ 2,400), while Jasper – Vancouver tickets are CA\$ 121 (₹ 6,000 approx) and Toronto – Vancouver CA\$ 364 (₹ 18,079 approx). The offer depends on the availability of tickets ([viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca)).

Take a journey through the history of trains in the Algarve, in the south of **Portugal**. **A LOOK AT THE RAILWAYS IN THE ALGARVE** exhibits iconic objects that are a part of train stations and the professions associated with them. To be held at the Museu Municipal de Faro till August 30, 2015, the exhibition commemorates 125 years of the arrival of the first passenger train in the region. Kids are very welcome! ([visitportugal.com/en/node/241729](http://visitportugal.com/en/node/241729))

## New Book!

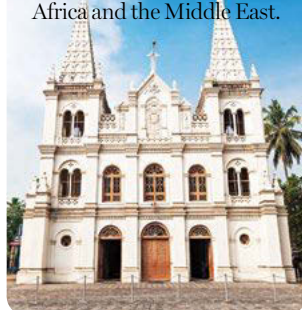
## The elephant says so

On our bookshelf, we have **Tania James's** new novel, **THE TUSK THAT DID THE DAMAGE**, which analyses the reality of elephant poaching in South India. Reviews tell us that this story of an elephant who has lost his mother is eminently readable and unimaginably tragic. Still, told through the voices of a poacher, a filmmaker and an elephant, it promises to be wildly interesting in the least (*Vintage Books/ Random House India*; ₹ 499).



## Spiced again!

**Kerala's** ancient seaport of Muziris, once rumoured to be a hub on the 2,000-year-old Spice Route that connected India's southwestern coast to Europe, is all set for a comeback. Kerala Tourism first launched the **MUZIRIS HERITAGE PROJECT**, one of India's largest conservation projects, to conserve the wealth of heritage and cultural diversity here. It extends from North Paravur in Ernakulam to Kodungalloor in Thrissur with plenty of museums, mosques, churches, Dutch palaces, synagogues and local markets to discover. The tourism board's now working with UNESCO to revive the historical Spice Route that connected 31 countries from Europe, Africa and the Middle East.



## Brunch out!

From classic American pancakes to less-known mid-morning treats such as Brazil's pão de queijo (cheese bread), **Lonely Planet's** latest book **THE WORLD'S BEST BRUNCHES** tells you where to find them and how to make them ([lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com)).



## New Book!



## Gadget Watch

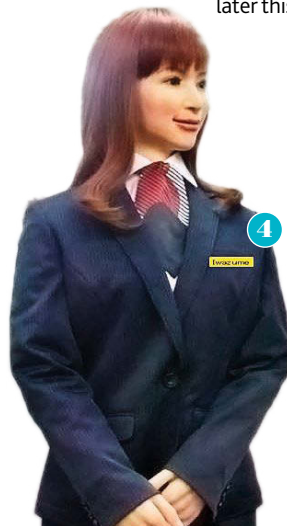
From reception robots to virtual reality, our pick of the latest innovations bringing tech to our travels

**1** Google's Translate app can now convert signs, menus and even speech on the fly (free; iOS and Android)

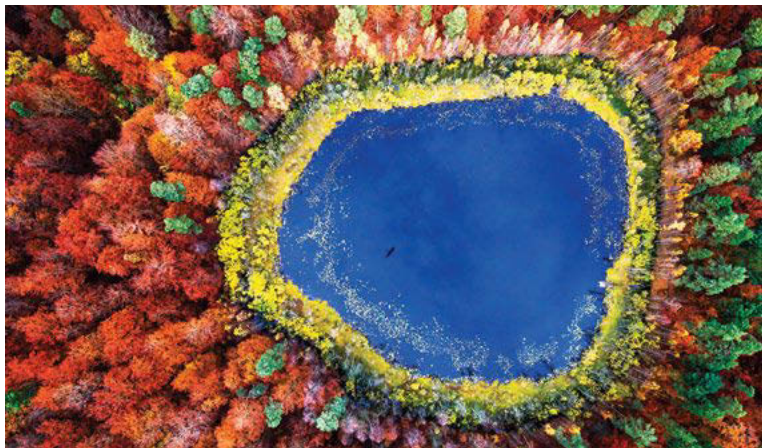
**2** In-flight virtual reality headsets, now being trialled by Qantas on selected flights

**3** The Apple Watch – expect to fork out at least £ 200 (₹ 18,000 approx)

**4** Robot hotel staff, debuting later this year in Japan's Henn-na Hotel







## WORLD PRESS PHOTO

This bird's-eye view of a lake was taken near the Polish city of **Gdynia** by local photog **Kacper Kowalski**, who paraglides 150m above the ground to capture his perspectives on nature. His project, *Side Effects*, was a winner at the **2015 WORLD PRESS PHOTO AWARDS** – see more at [worldpressphoto.org](http://worldpressphoto.org).

## Across Lucknow on two wheels

You can now bicycle through Lucknow's narrow, tapering lanes. Uttar Pradesh Tourism's planning to launch **LUCKNOW BY CYCLE**, which lets you rent a bicycle for ₹ 200 and discover the city's twisted, chaotic streets a tad more easily. This guided tour starts at Residency, and ends at the Shahnajaf Imambara, via the Chota Imambara and Bara Imambara. The scheme's starting with eight geared bicycles in Lucknow, and aims to roll out in Varanasi and Agra, too. Just think of how much faster you can get to all those kebabs and *biryani* ([uptourism.gov.in](http://uptourism.gov.in)).



## Get ready to Dash

Feeling a bit cooped up in the city? Your SUV looking dusty in its garage? Early registrations are on for the **HIMALAYAN DASH 2015**, a convoy self-drive expedition for those with premium cars (with good ground-clearance). The Dash takes you from Shimla to Srinagar, 2,000km over 11 nights in great upscale hotels; registration is open to anyone with a valid-in-India driver's licence, and who owns an off-road-capable car with either two- or four-wheel drive. Visit [cougarmotorsport.in](http://cougarmotorsport.in) to register.



*Simon Reeve has a new three-part series, Caribbean with Simon Reeve, out in the UK with BBC Two*

### Any neglected destinations you think we should visit?

Haiti's got a really bad rep – but unfairly so. It's got big problems, but it's also phenomenally beautiful and Haitians are welcoming and friendly. I felt safer there than I did in lots of other Caribbean countries. The real test is: "Would I feel okay walking with my son?" And yes, I would.

### How about new experiences – any you'd recommend?

In the Dominican Republic, I took a ride on a flying boat. Actually, it was a very small dinghy with a wing, a propeller and a motor attached. It's captained by a magnificently bonkers Frenchman in Punta Cana, who zips you along the sea before you shoot up into the sky and zoom around at some considerable height. It was absolutely brilliant fun.

### What new bit of kit wouldn't you travel without?

When it's dark, I will not step outdoors without a Streamlight Nano torch – it's saved my life several times. Once, in the Kalahari Desert, I was answering a call of nature at night and picked up the glinting eyes of a marauding lion about 20 metres ahead. I made a lot of noise and scared it away.

### Where are you dreaming about visiting next?

Russia. It occupies such a vast swathe of our planet, and there is a lot more that we need to know about it.

*Ed Pratt, a 19-year-old Brit, has just set off to cross the world – by unicycle.*

*Follow him at [worldunicycletour.com](http://worldunicycletour.com)*



**New Book!**

## Best Escapes Japan

Ready to hit the Land of the Rising Sun but not sure how? Especially for the Indian traveller, **BEST ESCAPES JAPAN** from **Lonely Planet India** comes packed with handy itineraries for Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and other cities, easy-to-use maps, local transport tips, and insights into Japanese customs and culture. Look for the Top 12 Experiences, hidden gems, best of local food and fine dining recommendations, as well as tips from experts familiar with Japan (*Lonely Planet India*; ₹425).



## Travel News

**New! New! New!**



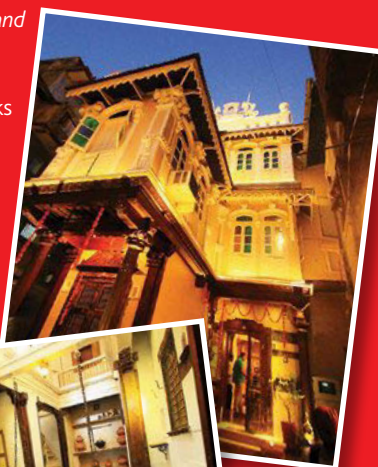
**L**OCATED in **Bangkok's** central Ratchaprasong District and right next to a sky train station, the **ANANTARA SIAM BANGKOK HOTEL's** strategic address isn't its biggest – or only – draw. With 354 luxurious rooms (above) overlooking tropical gardens and the pool, 10 dining options, an award-winning spa and a range of family-friendly services, this property seems to tick all the right boxes ([anantara.com](http://anantara.com)).

**T**HE **GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY** will re-open its doors in New Plymouth, on **North Island, New Zealand**, with the new **Len Lye Centre** on July 25, 2015. This is the country's first museum dedicated to a single artist, New Zealand-born Len Lye, who is known for his experimental films and kinetic sculptures. The gallery offers free access to Lye's multi-media artwork ([govettbrewster.com](http://govettbrewster.com)).

**M**AHINDRA HOLIDAYS launches its fifth wildlife resort and its first in **Madhya Pradesh**. Located on the outskirts of Kanha National Park, the **CLUB MAHINDRA KANHA** is spread across 15 acres, with 50 rooms, a spa, an activity centre, a Fun Zone, swimming pool and a dedicated kids' area ([clubmahindra.com](http://clubmahindra.com)).

**E**THIOPIAN AIRLINES introduces double daily flights between **Addis Ababa** and **Mumbai**, operated by the B787 Dreamliner, making it easier to plan that trip to gape at Lalibela's rock churches, or stroll through the markets and museums of Addis Ababa, or say hello to the endangered walia ibex or the gelada baboon. Happy holidays! ([ethiopianairlines.com](http://ethiopianairlines.com))

**O**H la la! We are *très* excited about **FRENCH HAVELI** (right and below), an adorably restored heritage home in the heart of **Ahmedabad's** Old City. Quaint and charming, it looks so French with sunny yellow walls, white curtains and scrubbed blue vintage furniture. Yet, it's also so Gujarati in spirit, with room names like *Chabutro* (bird feeder) and *Agaashi* (terrace). The pet-friendly *haveli* also offers travellers a shared kitchen ([frenchhaveli.com](http://frenchhaveli.com); from ₹ 2,500).



## Go for whisky

Make your way to **Scotland** to celebrate the water of life. May is **WHISKY MONTH** across the country. The month starts with the popular Spirit of Speyside Festival, takes in Edinburgh's Whisky Strammash and the international celebrations around World Whisky Day (*May 15*) and ends with the Islay Festival. Go to [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com) for a full list of events.



## IT'S ALL WHALE HERE!

One doesn't really describe a museum experience as 'having a whale of a time', but the new permanent **WHALES OF ICELAND** exhibition in Reykjavik, **Iceland**, promises that you will do just that. Just a couple of minutes from the city centre, the exhibition showcases full-scale models of the 23 species of whales found in Icelandic waters, painstakingly crafted from steel and foam. You can walk alongside them and even click the occasional selfie with one of the many gentle giants on display here. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), a body that campaigns against whaling, hopes that this museum will help counter whaling in Iceland ([whalesoficeland.is/en](http://whalesoficeland.is/en); check website for timings; Fiskislóð 23–25, 101, Reykjavik; ₹ 1,200 adult, ₹ 700 child).



## High five for free wi-fi in Kolkata

Uh huh, you read that right. Nerds and Internet addicts rejoice: the next time you're in **Kolkata**, you can immediately hook your smart phone or tablet onto the world wide web for free. All slated to become the country's **FIRST COMPLETELY WI-FI ENABLED CITY**, high-speed 4G services are already available at Park Street, and Ghariat-Gol Park will soon follow suit, with plans to get the entire city wi-fi enabled by April-end.

PHOTOGRAPHS: HASHIM BADANI (WHISKY), SIMONE CATERWE/123RF (WHALE), JYOTHI KABAT (KOLKATA) & DK BHASKAR (VANCOUVER)



## Vancouver: Five Freebies

Who says working out doesn't come without a goodie or two? You pay an entry fee to shimmy up **URBAN GRIND**, the stairs that climb the 553ft Harbour Centre to the Vancouver Lookout on top, but you'll find a nice, cold beer waiting for you with 360° views of the city and a voucher redeemable for the same amount at the Harbour Court Food Centre ([harbourcentre.com](http://harbourcentre.com); ₹ 250).

The Whisky Wisemen Society, a not-for-profit organisation, has teamed up with **SHEBEEN WHISKY HOUSE** for a delightfully noble cause – drinking whisky for the greater good. Drop in on the third Thursday of every month at Shebeen in Gastown for a free welcome whisky, and hang around, for 10 per cent of every subsequent drink you

have will go to a Vancouver-based charity ([whiskywisemen.com](http://whiskywisemen.com)).

If you're happy and you know it, check out the **MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER's The Happy Show** by Stefan Sagmeister. The acclaimed artist explores the emotion of happiness through videos, sculptures, info graphics and interactive installations. Spoiler alert: there's a gumball machine installation! Entry on the last Thursday of every month from 5pm – 8pm is by donation ([museumofvancouver.ca](http://museumofvancouver.ca); Apr 23 to Sept 7, 2015).

Kids will love North America's largest free water park at **GRANVILLE ISLAND**, but, even for adults,

this brilliant, buzzing public market is a treat for the senses and free to visit. Once an industrial hub, it's now one of Canada's best urban redevelopments with great artisanal produce and studios and galleries ([granvilleisland.com](http://granvilleisland.com); 9am – 7pm).

Just minutes from downtown Vancouver, the **LOWER SEYMOUR CONSERVATION RESERVE's** lush foliage, alpine meadows and scenic trails is a mecca for hikers and cyclists. Walk, pack a picnic or jump into one of the swimming holes, and watch out for the odd bear ([vancouvernorthshore.com](http://vancouvernorthshore.com)).



## Water works

What's more fun than camping by the river while listening to live international music and watching dance performances? Nothing, that's what. This summer, the iconic **RIVER PARTY** promises five days of absolute revelry on the banks of the picturesque Aliakmonas River in **Greece**. The event sees 50,000 visitors and has been voted one of the most important European festivals ([riverparty.org](http://riverparty.org); Jul 29 – Aug 2, 2015).

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AND LOOK WHERE YOU'VE  
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Offers



Make your birthday a wet and wild one this year at **AQUAVENTURE**, Dubai's famed waterpark at **ATLANTIS THE PALM**. You get free entry during your birthday week; all you have to do is register your birthday on the website, and the free ticket will be emailed to you. Carry a printout and your passport and have a splash. This offer is valid through the year ([aquaventurebirthday.com](http://aquaventurebirthday.com)).



This summer, pack the kids off to **WILDRIFT ADVENTURES SUMMER CAMPS** in Uttarakhand. Pick from a bicycling and camping trip in the **Kumaon Hills** (May 31 – Jun 7, 2015; for ages 14 and over), a trek on the Namik Glacier, in **Pithoragarh**, passing rhododendron forests and rivers and waterfalls (May 31 – Jun 7, 2015; for ages 14 and over) or a swimming and kayaking camp at **Sattal** near Nainital (May 17 – 22, 2015; for ages nine and above). For more options and details, check the website ([wildrift.com](http://wildrift.com)).

Holidaying in the Big Apple? Take the kids along without worrying about the budget. The **TRIUMPH NEW YORK FAMILY EXPERIENCE** (left) is offering a two-night stay for a family of four starting from US \$ 579 (₹36,350 approx). The package includes tickets for two adults and two children to The Intrepid Sea or Air & Space Museum or Top of the Rock or Empire State Building (86th floor) or Central Park Zoo. The hotel will also give you a US \$ 20 Metrocard and a US \$ 25 gift card to a neighbourhood bagel shop along with other perks. You can choose from The Evelyn, The Iroquois or Hotel Belleclaire. The offer is valid through the year on two-bedded rooms or suites ([triumphhotels.com](http://triumphhotels.com)).



**THE METROPOLITAN HOTEL & SPA**, or The Met, in **Delhi**, is celebrating 15 years in the industry by offering you one night's free stay

on a booking of three nights. That's not all – the hotel will also throw in daily breakfast, free wi-fi and a complimentary upgrade to a Club Room – all for just ₹6,999/ night/ couple ([hotelmetdelhi.com](http://hotelmetdelhi.com); till August 31, 2015).

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Anything to Declare?

# The best way to see Italy is by train

THAT'S WITHOUT THE HASSLES OF ITALIAN DRIVING AND THE DISORIENTATION OF AIRPORTS, WRITES TIM PARKS

A small local train rolls alongside Capo Bruzzano Beach in Reggio Calabria, south-west Italy, and (below) one of the steam trains dating back to 1908



**Train travel in Italy is never simply time lost waiting to reach your destination.** In figuring out the ticketing system, getting your head around the PA announcements, dealing with the conductors, and watching the landscape unfold outside while your fellow passengers gesticulate their way through some Latin melodrama, you're going to learn a huge amount about Italy.

**Italy was unified, one pundit claimed in the 1860s, *con eserciti e ferrovie*** (with armies and railways), and, although no one but the *carabinieri* travels armed these days, trains are still a great way to get a grip on the whole peninsula.

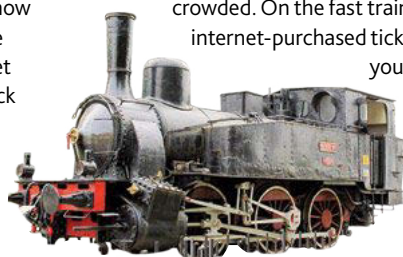
**A whole range of train experiences can be had:** the slow Regionali crawling from one *campanile* (bell tower) to the next, the high-speed Freccie racing at 350kmph from Turin, through Milan, Bologna, Rome and Naples all the way down to Salerno, and the pompous old Intercities, with their ochre-curtained compartments and dusty upholstery making the epic coastal runs down the Adriatic to Lecce and the Tyrrhenian to Reggio Calabria. It's best to try both first class and second, if only to see how often, in first on a Regionale, half the passengers disappear when the ticket collector comes around and drift back when he's safely gone.



Tim Parks has lived in Italy since 1981.

The most recent of his four books about his adopted home is *Italian Ways: On and Off the Rails from Milan to Palermo*.

**Different rolling stock and standards of cleanliness will give you a good idea of the development gap between the north and the south.** In the prosperous north, the frequent, fast, reservations-only trains are crowding out the slower Regionali. The government obliges the railways to offer 'social prices' for commuters, so some trains have to be dirt cheap, but there are fewer and fewer of them, and they are ever more crowded. On the fast trains, you can show your internet-purchased ticket to the conductor on your mobile without wasting any time at ticket windows or machines.



**In the far south, there are no fast trains,** and the conductor has never seen a ticket on a mobile. That said, by far my favourite journey in Italy is the long ride round the southern Calabrian coast from Reggio to Crotona, then along the Gulf of Taranto, the instep of Italy's boot, to Puglia. Noisy, two-carriage diesels with primitive AC trundle you along an endless string of tiny stations – Torre Melissa, Cirò, Crucoli, Cariati, Mandatoriccio Campana, Calopezzati, Mirto Crosia. Old men drink wine under sunshades on the platform; there's the haunting sound of a bell ringing to announce the arrival of the train; cactii grow wild beside the lines; the sea to the right, a solid dazzle of blue, and the thirsty southern hills to the left; rocks and fig trees; villas, villages and squat ancient towers. The eight-hour journey has a dreamy, meditative feel that helps you understand how the very idea of punctuality might seem mad to someone who grew up in these parts.

**From the south, there's only one smart way back:** the 13-hour night train ride from Lecce. If you're with your partner, get a two-bed compartment all to yourselves. The rhythm of the rails and the swaying of the carriage as it races along the moonlit Adriatic beaches are guaranteed aphrodisiacs. At Milan's magnificent station, at 7am, a strong cappuccino is waiting to usher you back into the world of appointments and timetables.

PHOTOGRAPHS: REVI/ALEX MACNAUGHTON (TIM PARKS), ALESSANDRO SAFFO/SIME/4CORNER (REGGIO CALABRIA), MARCO PERGER/123RF (STEAM TRAIN)  
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# THE SEASONS. THE TIDES. YOUR BODY CLOCK. YOU MAKE THE CONNECTION.

mudra\_9463



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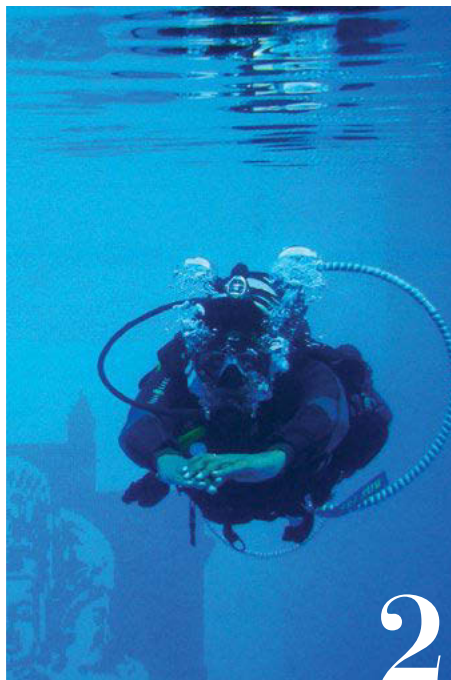


# Easy Trips

*you can do now*



1



2



3



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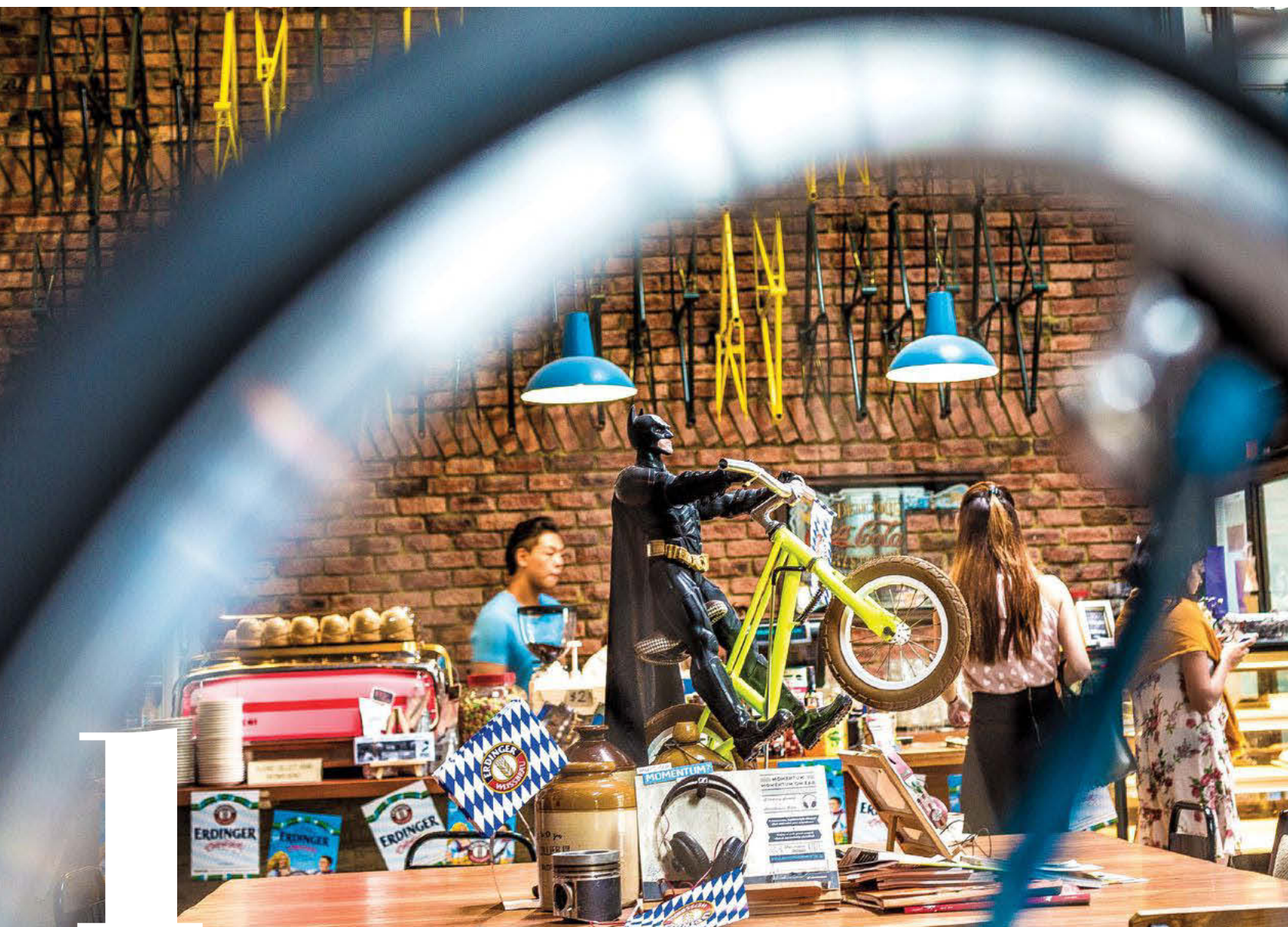


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## inside

- 1. CAFÉ-HOPPING IN SINGAPORE**  
From the quirky to the cute, discover some of the island-nation's most decadent cafés
- 2. TARKARLI, Sindhudurg, Maharashtra**  
Get a crash-course in scuba-diving right here in India
- 3. PARAGLIDING IN BIR, Kangra Himachal Pradesh**  
Soar higher than the eagles in a tiny village in the hills
- 4. GORUBATHAN, West Bengal**  
Explore the less-known tea estates in Fagu and enjoy great mountain views in Jhandi
- 5. ALIBAUG, Maharashtra**  
Cool stays to beat the heat this summer





## Café-hopping through Singapore

### EAT YOUR HEART OUT

Lots can transpire in a café. It's a place where some of the most daring and creative ideas are born, a place where you bond with someone, a place in which to introspect. And Singapore, a nation that takes its food and drink seriously, is home to some of the funkiest. There's a selection of cafés in the city that each have distinct personalities all their own, while encouraging a sense of community.

Like **Symmetry**, a thoughtful café that gets its name from the idea that everything in life needs harmony. This probably explains how remarkably it holds together the very disparate elements that constitute it. Images of Campbell's Soup

cans adorn the walls, a framed picture, featuring a playful re-telling of *The Last Supper*, hangs on a wall alongside tongue-in-cheek signboards. Reminding you with each mouthful that Singapore is a melting pot, the food pays homage to classical French cuisine, while drawing inspiration from the Australian dining scene, with a focus on the seasonal and the fresh. And if you love what you've ordered so much that you want to share the meal with the gang of friends you've arrived with, you've got Symmetry's seal of approval – the café encourages sharing (see *Where to Eat for all details*; coffee from ₹ 215, mains from ₹ 900).

**Above and below:** The interiors of Wheeler's Yard, a spacious, industrial warehouse – now café – where bikes adorn table tops

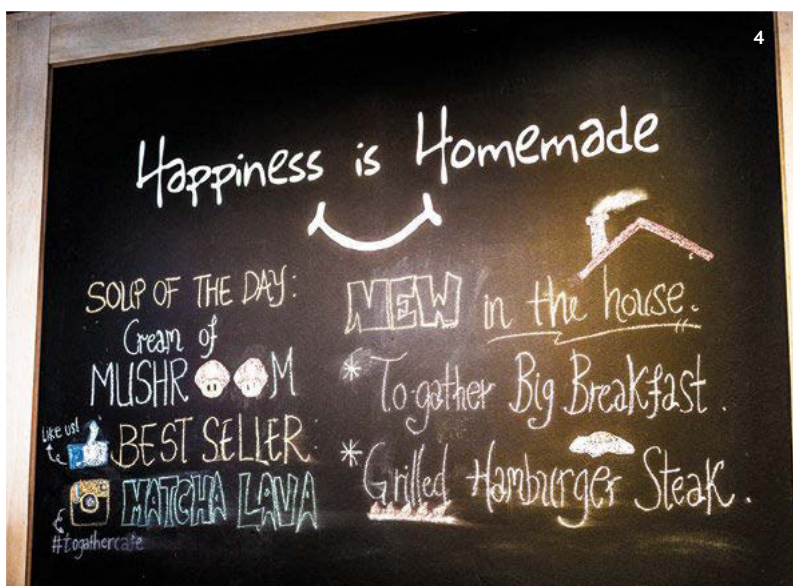
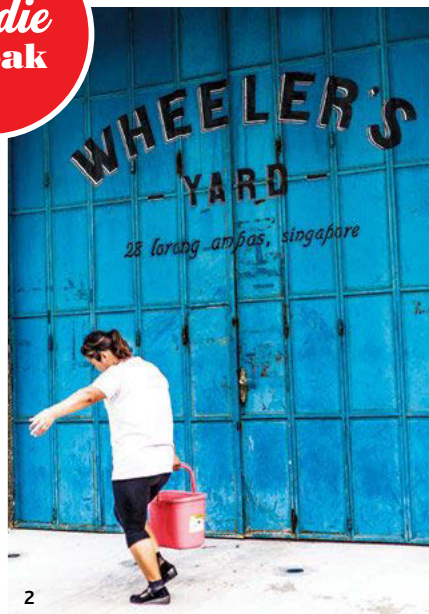


Another eatery that's as encouraging of community dining is **To-gather Café**. The interiors, littered with small potted plants, let the sun in, and there's even a play area for children, with a miniature cooking range. The staff and guests have posted their favourite quotations on corkboards. The menu offers wholesome, home-cooked food but that which is made on special occasions. Think grilled *pandan* chicken chops, and baked Japanese curry and rice (coffee from ₹ 150, mains from ₹ 380).

The charming, hipster neighbourhood of **Tiong Bahru** is infused with the decadent fragrance of freshly-brewed coffee and pastry. This is because the area is home



## Foodie Break



### GREAT FROM India

### GREAT FOR Stuffing yourself silly.

### GO NOW While the weather's fine and the cafés are bustling.

to some of the coolest coffee shops and hottest boutiques in town. Follow your nose into **Tiong Bahru Bakery** in pursuit of delectable breads, berry tarts, a *croque monsieur* – the Parisian café cliché – and a cappuccino (pastries from ₹ 240).

Next door, **The Orange Thimble Café** reflects the diversity of the area (coffee from ₹ 200, mains from ₹ 430). Young and old diners sit together in harmonious bliss, admiring the art for sale on the walls, beaming at glass cases that brim over with rainbow cakes and chocolates that shine like jewels.

Save the best for last. **Wheeler's Yard** is a spacious, former industrial warehouse, now converted into a café, selling a great range of handmade urban bicycles, suspended on table tops and parked between tables. This café would have the style editors of any design magazine biting their nails with excitement. Biking helmets adorn walls and the sign for the restrooms

1. The very cheerful staff at **To-gather Café**, which encourages sharing

2. The much-photographed, monumental door at **Wheeler's Yard**

3. A playful take on *The Last Supper* at the funky **Symmetry**

5. Cheerful quotes pepper the walls at **To-gather Café**

5. The scrumptious breakfast at **Wheeler's Yard** that presupposes you're wearing elastic pants

is hung from a miniature bike. Even the wi-fi code is a license plate number. The headphones attached to the tables tempt you to linger in this cavernous space. Once you're done with your unpretentious Wheeler's Yard Big Breakfast – a meal of brioche, bacon, cheesy pork sausage and sautéed mushrooms (₹ 900) – you can hire a bicycle here and ride around Singapore. It's hard to disagree with the restaurant tagline – Wheeler's Yard has momentum (coffee from ₹ 190, mains from ₹ 800, bike hire: ₹ 400/ hour).

WORDS SONIA NAZARETH  
PHOTOGRAPHS JYOTHY KARAT





## FACT SHEET

## GETTING THERE

**Closest airport:** Changi Airport (20km). Singapore Airlines, Jet Airways and Air India fly to Singapore from most metro cities (return fares from ₹ 16,700 from Chennai, ₹ 23,400 from Mumbai).

## GETTING AROUND

The convenient **Singapore Tourist Pass**, or EZ-Link card, offers visitors unlimited travel on basic buses,

the MRT and the LRT trains ([ezlink.com.sg](http://ezlink.com.sg)). Each card comes with a rental deposit of ₹ 460, which is refundable as long as the card is returned within five days from the day you buy it (one-day pass from ₹ 460, excluding the price of the deposit). As Singapore has such excellent public transport, it makes sense to have this handy. But when you're in the city, a taxi is preferable over the short distances. If you want to calculate an approximate fare before you travel, visit [taxisingapore.com](http://taxisingapore.com) (fares from ₹ 144).



## WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel Re! @ Pearl's Hill:** With decor inspired by the 1960s and '70s, this is a cool and comfy pick. Rooms come with LCD TVs, wi-fi and fancy bathrooms (00-65-6827-8288; [hotelre.com.sg](http://hotelre.com.sg), [enquiry@hotelre.com.sg](mailto:enquiry@hotelre.com.sg); 175A, Chin Swee Rd; from ₹ 8,400).

**Wanderlust:** If funky and experimental means anything to you, this is a stay option you'll love. Think a lobby rife with industrial glam and cosy rooms designed in Pantone hues or inspired by origami and pop art. In short, rooms bigger on ideas than on space, but comfortable and so out-of-the-box, you're inspired to take some ideas and implement them back home (00-65-6396-3322; [wanderlusthotel.com](http://wanderlusthotel.com), [wlh-res@unlistedcollection.com](mailto:wlh-res@unlistedcollection.com); No 2, Dickson Rd; from ₹ 9,100 with breakfast).

**Naumi Hotel:** This home-away-from-home is chic and modern. The service is attentive and welcoming, and the artistic

interventions subtle. The rooftop infinity pool might be small, but it's a peaceful place to lounge, and offers great city views. A huge draw is the breakfast buffet – great for weight-watchers and for those who aren't, sparkling wine accompanies each breakfast here. There are other perks too like happy hours for beer and wine (4.30pm – 6.30pm daily), a mini-bar with free refills of non-alcoholic drinks, and a little amenities pouch. And that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to thoughtful attention to detail (00-65-6403-6000; [naumihotel.com](http://naumihotel.com), [naumi.aide@naumihotels.com](mailto:naumi.aide@naumihotels.com); 41, Seah St; from ₹ 13,700 with breakfast).



## WHAT TO EAT

- 1 **Symmetry Café:** 00-65-6291-9901; [symmetry.com.sg](http://symmetry.com.sg); 9, Jalan Kubor; check website for timings
- 2 **To-gather Café:** 00-65-6445-1011; [togathercafe.com.sg](http://togathercafe.com.sg); 84, Bedock North St 4; check website for timings
- 3 **Tiong Bahru Bakery:** 00-65-6220-3430; [tiongbahrubakery.com](http://tiongbahrubakery.com); 56, Eng

Hoon St; 8am – 8pm Sun – Thur, till 10pm Fri – Sat

4 **The Orange Thimble Café:** 00-65-6223-8068; 56, Eng Hoon St; No 01-68; 10.30am – 10pm

5 **Wheeler's Yard:** 00-65-6254-9128; [wheelersyard.com](http://wheelersyard.com); 28, Lor Ampas; check website for timings



## WHAT TO PACK

Sunglasses, sunhat, sunscreen, walking shoes and light, breathable clothing, antacids and any prescription medicines you require



## SHOPPING

**Orchard Road** is a mecca for shopaholics. If you're short on time and want to find local designers, one-off pieces, thoughtfully-curated selections and timeless well-crafted objects for home and hearth, **Keepers – Singapore Designer Collective** is your one-stop shop (00-65-8299-7109; [keepers.com.sg](http://keepers.com.sg); Orchard Green, Junction of Cairnhill Rd & Orchard Rd; 11am – 10pm; from ₹ 700).



## MEDICAL AID

In case of an emergencies, head to **Raffles Hospital** (00-65-6311-1111; [rafflesmedicalgroup.com](http://rafflesmedicalgroup.com); 585, North Bridge Rd).

## CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

There's plenty for children to do here. Head to the **Alive Museum** to see the three-dimensional artworks, which are a clever play of light, perspective and shadow – and make for great photo-ops ([alivemuseum.sg](http://alivemuseum.sg); Suntec City Mall No 03-372 [between Towers 3 and 4]; 10am – 10pm; ₹ 1,150 adult [13 years and above], ₹ 900 child [three – 12 years]).

## GOOD TO KNOW

- \* **EMBASSY:** High Commission of India, Singapore: [hcsingapore.gov.in](http://hcsingapore.gov.in)
- \* **CURRENCY:** 1 Singapore Dollar (SG\$) = ₹ 45.78
- \* **VISA:** A tourist visa takes one working day to process ([mfa.gov.sg](http://mfa.gov.sg); SG\$ 30 [approx ₹ 1,370]).
- \* All the cafés mentioned here have some veg options, but when you order, mention specifically what you mean by being vegetarian, especially if you don't want eggs or fish sauce.
- \* For a quick overview of the city, visit **Singapore City Gallery** (00-65-6321-8321; [singaporecitygallery.sg](http://singaporecitygallery.sg); 45, Maxwell Rd, The URA Centre; 9am – 5pm Mon – Sat; free).



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## Tarkarli, Sindhudurg, Maharashtra

### DIVE INTO CLEAN, COOL WATERS

Scuba diving can be a life-changing experience. And it is indeed addictive. If you haven't done scuba diving before, and are planning a trip to international waters, why not pick up (or hone) diving skills on home ground right here in India? You read that right. Tarkarli, a Malvani village in Sindhudurg, is home to a state-of-the-art, effortlessly-efficient scuba diving centre. So do yourself a favour right now. Book tickets to Tarkarli for your next weekend and sit back with a smug smile, because this is the best time to discover scuba diving or to become a certified diver.

The **Indian Institute of Scuba Diving and Aquatic Sports (IISDA)** is perhaps the best training facility you can find on the Indian mainland right now. Nestled between Tarkarli Beach and the backwaters, the newly-opened facility offers scuba-diving sessions to people of all levels of expertise along with lodging. If you've never dived before, sign up for the Discover Scuba Diving (DSD) programme (00-91-2365-248790/92; [iisda.mtdc@gmail.com](mailto:iisda.mtdc@gmail.com); Tarkarli, Malvan Taluk; ₹ 4,000). You'll have a pool session with an instructor prior to your dive in the ocean in which you'll be given a brief

*Above and 4. Hardik Datanwala, the instructor at the IISDA, shows you the ropes at the scuba-diving session in the in-house pool*

introduction to scuba diving and safety measures. The pool at the IISDA is something to marvel at. It dips to a whopping 7.5m with underwater murals you could gape at (selfie-op alert!) and has suspended rings large enough for a person to pass through. You could invent your own games or simply test your buoyancy skills with the help of these rings. What this depth also means is that you can get a feel of what it's like to be in the open waters. Your instructor will show you how to equalise pressure as you descend. If you are diving with the IISDA, expect to be pampered. The cheerful







## GREAT FROM

Mumbai, Pune, Goa and Bangalore

## GREAT FOR

A crash course in scuba diving.

## GO NOW

While the water is cool and welcoming, and the dive centre's facilities are sparkling new!

staff makes sure all your gear is sparkly clean and ready for your dive the following day. A swanky speedboat picks you up from the jetty to take you to the dive site, **Vengurla Rocks**, about

45 minutes away. If not for the hot *vada pav* distributed by the staff on the boat, it's easy to forget that you are in India. At a glance, the Vengurla Rock Island looks like someone dumped a pile of rocks in the middle of the ocean and decided to stick some toy buildings on it. Although the old lighthouse (which the locals claim was built by the Portuguese) and the few buildings on the island look abandoned and bare, the new lighthouse in a vibrant red and white looks gorgeous against the lovely blue ocean. This is where you'll jump in, escorted by an instructor. The dives are vastly influenced by weather conditions. Visibility could be an abysmal 3m at the

**1. Malvan town is a short ride away from Tarkarli**

**2. The water is lovely and blue at the surface near Vengurla Rocks, but could be murky at the bottom – you'll enjoy your dive anyway**

**3. Pomfret, king fish, prawns, mackerel and crab are Malvani favourites**

**5. You'll be hard-pressed to find bad seafood in the Malvan region**

bottom and you might have currents and waves on the surface, but, if you're lucky, you could find a few blue ring angelfish inspecting your nose underwater – they're curious about strange bubble-emitting creatures in their home. Be respectful, stay still and resist the urge to pick up a gorgonian coral or a shell for your souvenir collection.

When you return from that first dive, take a stroll down pristine Tarkarli Beach and ponder over the vast blue mystery that's spread in front of you. You now have a chance to get to know its secrets. Grab it while you can.

**WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS JYOTHY KARAT**







# YOU DON'T COME HERE TO CATCH UP ON YOUR SLEEP.



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## Paragliding in Bir, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

### CHILLING IN BILLING

In the tiny village of Bir, in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh, if you look up at the sky on a sunny day, it's possible you'll see more people than birds. One of the best paragliding spots in the world, Billing in Bir Village is an unsung place.

It might have some things going against it – for one, it's rather far (293km from Chandigarh, 65km from Dharamsala) and the stay options are limited, but, in summers and from October to November, when the weather is ideal, this village sees pilots from across the globe congregate at the take-off point to hurl themselves off a cliff attached to nothing more than a paraglider.

At 2,400m, the take-off point brings you pretty much at eye level with the snowy peaks of the Dhauladhar Ranges. And once you take flight, you could even fly over this range – depending on the thermals, of course. Because it's all about the thermals – the hot air that collects in a ridge and which helps the pilots get what they call a 'lift' so that they can soar higher. Whether you're lucky enough to get great thermals or not-so-good ones, one thing's for sure: it'll earn you some serious bragging rights.

It's only on the 14km drive up to Billing that you realise just how high up the starting point is, so, if you're afraid of heights, you might want to rethink

**Above:** It's easy to see why Billing has been voted one of the best paragliding spots in the world

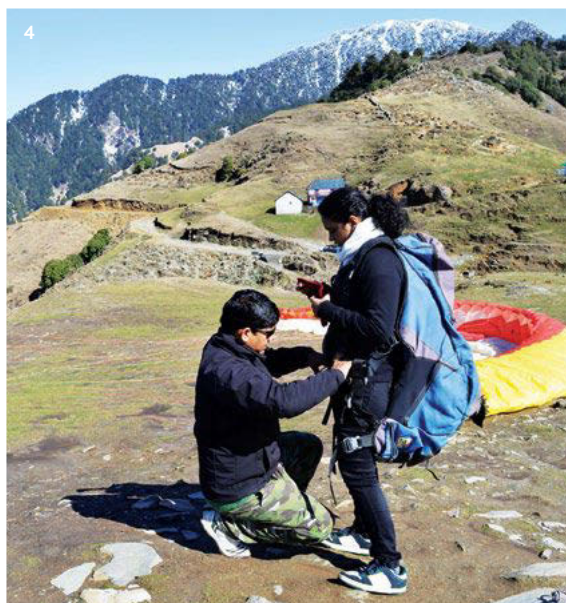
**Below:** The spaghetti at the Garden Café is fresh and fantastic

your flapping-off-a-cliff dream. When you do take flight, the sight of the Dhauladhars so close to you is pure thrill. On your tandem flight, the pilot takes you over some ridges, pointing out Dharamsala in the distance, while you look here, there, and everywhere all at once. Soon, the sky is filled with other colourful canopies and squeals of delight from ecstatic fliers. You can't blame them; you'll be 'whoo-hoo'ing the whole way to the landing site yourself.

They couldn't have picked a prettier spot for the landing either. It offers front-row seats to a grand sunset behind the pine-covered hills with terraced fields all around. Hang around once you've landed to watch







## GREAT FROM

New Delhi, Chandigarh

## GREAT FOR

An adventure holiday.

## GO NOW

While the weather's conducive for paragliding.

other gliders float down from the skies and relive the moment (*Extreme Flying Club*: 00-91-9816670009 [Desh Raj Kapoor]; [extremeflyingclub.com](http://extremeflyingclub.com); [deshraj@extremeflyingclub.com](mailto:deshraj@extremeflyingclub.com); closed Jul 15 – Sept 15; ₹2,500/ person for a tandem flight, flying

time varies between 15 minutes to 45 minutes depending on weather conditions, book the night before).

The landing site is a short walk from the **Tibetan Colony**, where you can dig into some steaming momos from street stalls, or linger over cups of cappuccino at one of the many cafés, watching monks pass by. The Colony is also a good starting point for monastery hopping. There's the **Palyul Chökhöring Monastery** with stunning white murals on its black walls and the **Chokling Monastery**, set in a Japanese-style garden. But if you have to visit just one monastery here, head to the large **Dzongsar Monastery**, not just for its size, but also for the serene locale,

1. The **Chokling Monastery** is set in a pretty Japanese-style garden

2. Bir is a typical Himachali village with picturesque fields everywhere you look

3. **Colonel's Resort** is the perfect stay option in Bir

4. Once the harness is attached, you're off before you have the time to overthink your bravado

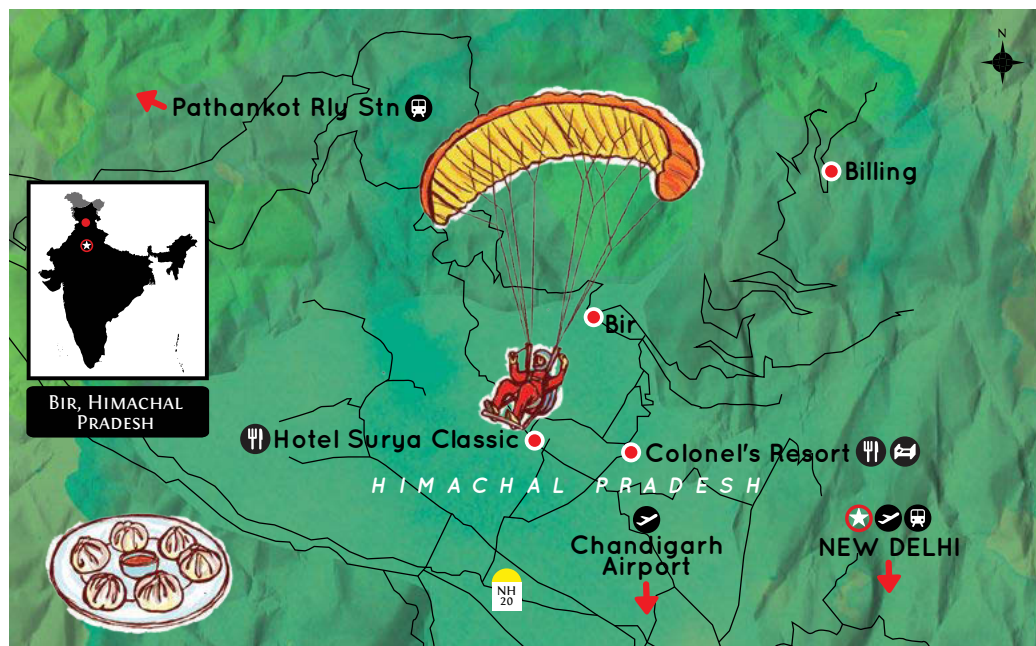
5. The centuries-old **Bajjnath Temple** is quite close to Bir

unlike the others that are in the market.

A great place at which to stay on this trip is **Colonel's Resort**, based in a tea plantation (see *Where to Stay*). The Himachali-style cottages come with beautiful furniture like the engraved coffee table with elephant-shaped legs and are set within a garden with pear and plum trees – so expect fresh fruit and jams at breakfast. There are lovely mountain views to be had from the dining area and, thanks to its proximity to the take-off point, you might also spot a paraglider or two from your perch.

WORDS HARDIKA PANCHAL  
PHOTOGRAPHS KRISHNA ANGIRA



**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

**Closest metro:** New Delhi (535km)

**Closest airport:** Chandigarh Airport (293km).

Although **Gaggal Airport** (67km; also known as *Kangra Airport*) is closer, currently only two airlines operate on this route – Air India and SpiceJet, and they're unreliable due to the unpredictable weather (return fares from ₹ 8,700). Flying into Chandigarh makes more sense, especially for a larger group so you can split the cost of car hire. Air India, Jet Airways and SpiceJet fly there from New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 4,232). From here, it's a scenic if long (about seven-hour) drive (see *Getting Around*).

**Closest railhead:** Pathankot (approx 144km; PTK).

Get there by the **11077 Jhelum Express**

(leaves New Delhi [NDLS] 9.05pm, arrives PTK 7am;

₹ 735 Third AC) and return by the **12446 Uttar Sampark Kranti Express** (leaves PTK 10.48pm, arrives NDLS 6.50am; ₹ 780 Third AC).

**GETTING AROUND**

In Bir, there's no public transport, and distances aren't very short, so you'll need to hire a car. If you're staying at **Colonel's Resort**, you can hire a car. We used and liked the services of **Summit Adventures** (00-91-1892-221679/ 220403; summit-adventures.net; office@summit-adventures.net; from Chandigarh Airport: ₹ 5,800/ one-way for an AC Swift Dzire, ₹ 2,200/ day for an AC Swift Dzire).

**WHERE TO STAY****Namlang-Himal Resort:**

This resort enjoys a good location – close to the Tibetan Colony. The cottages are no-frills but comfy and set in a garden. There's an in-house restaurant too (00-91-9816351633; namlanghimaltourism.org, namlanghimal03@gmail.com; near Chaugan, Bir, Baijnath, Kangra; ₹ 825).

**Colonel's Resort:** A perfect idyllic getaway and the best stay option in Bir, this resort is owned by the affable Colonel JP Singh and his lovely wife Pratibha. There are 11 rooms and cottages. Pick the individually-themed cottages that come with a little porch from which you can spot the red-billed blue magpies in the garden. The colonel enjoys trekking and nature walks, and will happily organise these for you. He even offers rides on the

beautiful resident horses for adults as well as children (00-91-9882377469; Bir, Baijnath, Kangra; colonelsresort@gmail.com; from ₹ 3,000 with breakfast; trek prices depend on duration and group size, check directly, horse ride: ₹ 100/ person).

Bir has a fairly large Tibetan population, which means there's great food to be had and shopping to be done here

**WHAT TO EAT**

Colonel's Resort does great North Indian food and even better continental fare. Think chicken in garlic sauce, and a creamy spinach and macaroni bake – brilliant stuff! Breakfast is included in the tariff, while lunch (₹ 250/ person) and dinner (₹ 450/ person) are extra (see *Where to Stay*). Apart from Tibetan fare, there's also hearty Himachali food to be had in Bir. **Hotel Surya Classic** does great *rajma* (₹ 90) and *paneer kadhai* (₹ 200). The menu also



features a range of chicken dishes like butter chicken (₹ 400) and chicken *korma* at ₹ 180 (00-91-9418046580, 00-91-9418042371; suryaclassic.com; Chougan Bir, Baijnath, Kangra; 8am – 9pm).

**Garden Café** is a great place for Italian fare. Try the yummy spaghetti that comes with sautéed capsicum and mushroom (₹ 150), and the fresh garden salad (₹ 110). There's also a range of pancakes, shakes and more for breakfast (00-91-9418088251; Bir, Kangra; 8am – 10pm).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Warm clothes for the mornings and evenings, good walking shoes, motion-sickness medication, gloves if you're paragliding as your hands get very cold

**SHOPPING**

**Norling** at the Garden Café has Tibetan artefacts like leather-bound notebooks, keychains, silk pouches and pretty hair sticks (see *Where to Eat*; keychains from ₹ 50).

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

About two hours into the drive from Chandigarh, **Heritage Haveli** is a great place for a loo stop and also to grab amazing authentic North Indian food – and the loos are fancy, too! Don't miss the freshly-made *jalebis* at ₹ 90/ 100g (00-91-1881-301000/ 99; heritagehaveli.co.in; 6th Mile stone before Ropar, Chandigarh-Ropar Rd, NH 21, Ropar, Punjab; mains from ₹ 130).

**MEDICAL AID**

There's a government-run clinic in Bir that can handle minor ailments, else there's also the **Vivekananda Medical institute** in Palampur, 30km away (00-91-1894-236010). The **Fortis Hospital** at Kangra (64km) is well equipped for emergencies (00-91-1892-242560; fortis.healthcare.com; Kangra-Dharamsala Rd).

**CHILD-FRIENDLINESS**

There's no age limit for paragliding, but you must weigh no less than 20kg and no more than 110kg. Kids can accompany you on treks and go on horse rides, too.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

- \* The **Paragliding World Cup** will be held here (Oct 24 – 31, 2015). It gets really crowded, and you might have to wait in long lines to get your turn.
- \* **Baijnath** (12km) is where the Shiva temple is sited – it's a popular pilgrimage spot (5.15am – 9pm).



# SOMETIMES, A CAMERA ONLY COMES IN THE WAY.



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## 4

## Gorubathan, West Bengal

## THE TRIFECTA OF THE EAST

Never has the offbeat traveller had it so tough. In a fully mapped-out and exhaustively-reviewed world, there are almost no places left to discover, no new paths to tread. This why the Dooars, possibly the last untrodden frontier of the country, makes for such a tempting trip. Forget treading new paths, here you might sometimes not even find one and Google Maps will totally give up on you.

Stretching from Assam to West Bengal, the Dooars is a vast, wild forest land that simply means 'the doors' (insert British accent here) to Bhutan. Once you cross over the historic Coronation Bridge from

Siliguri, the gateway to the West Bengal, you find yourself in a land that the world has left behind; a land that is a trifecta of thick, whispering sal forests, lush tea gardens and dizzyingly tall white mountains.

The perfect place to begin your explorations is the tea country of **Fagu**. Stretching in a sea of green on either side of the road, the tea gardens escort you as you make your way up to **Fagu Tea Bungalow**, a 100-year-old plantation bungalow – a dwelling that's in full possession of its colonial charm, if a little worse for wear. Where creature comforts fall short, the

Above: CTC Tea ready to be packed at the Fagu Tea Estate

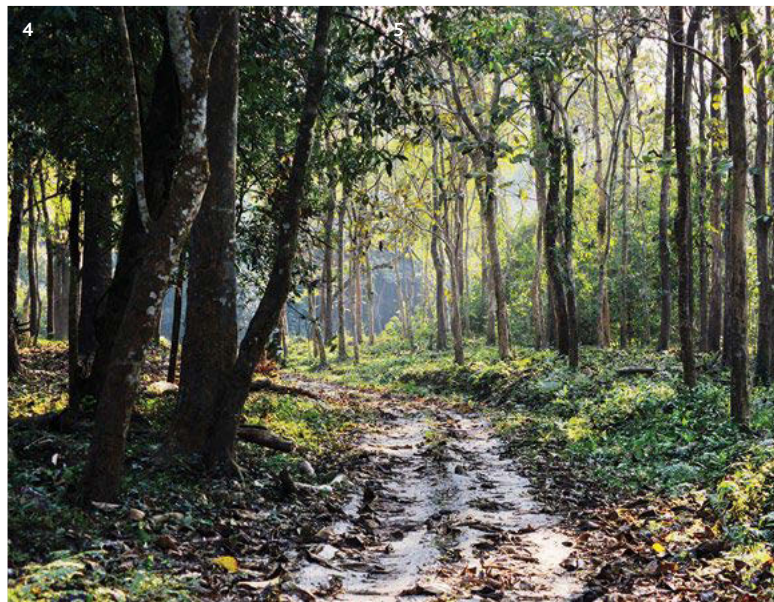
Below: The food at Fagu is of the home-cooked variety, like this *bhurji*



atmosphere delivers, romancing even the most loyal coffee-drinker into considering a relationship with tea. A trip to the tea factory at Lower Fagu (*entry free*) only makes this affair much more heady. Housed in vintage, colonial-era buildings and run on old machines that the British forgot to take back with them, this tea factory still uses arcane tea-testing equipment that includes an antique sand timer and brass weights.

A few kilometres away is the picturesque **Mission Hill Tea Estate**, with its Estate Hospital right out of a Victorian novel, and a village that is a neat little forested enclosure with colourful clapboard





## GREAT FROM

Kolkata, Siliguri, Kalimpong, Darjeeling

## GREAT FOR

Three glorious landscapes in one destination.

## GO NOW

To run away from summer.

houses, a source of endless charm. Past the village, the road winds down to the gurgling **River Chel** – feel free to picnic right in the middle of the road, as nobody will ask you to move.

For a change of scene, take the road

from Upper Fagu to **Jhandi**, which is only 20-odd kilometres, but you'll feel every one of them. If you and your SUV stay strong, your efforts will be rewarded. The road will suddenly turn at a lone house at the corner and the lofty peaks of Mt Kachendzonga will stare down at you, imperiously demanding why you're cribbing about a little rough road. There's only one stay option here. **Jhandi Eco Huts**, with many plastic chairs and nylon curtains, is so new on the circuit, it's going to take a while for it to make it to a map.

Take a trek to the top of the mountain at the crack of dawn. Not only will you be rewarded with an orange sun bathing white peaks, but also trenches dug

1. The no-frills rooms at Jhandi Eco Huts offer amazing views

2. Tea being tested the old-fashioned way at Fagu

3. Cute clapboard houses dot the villages in this area

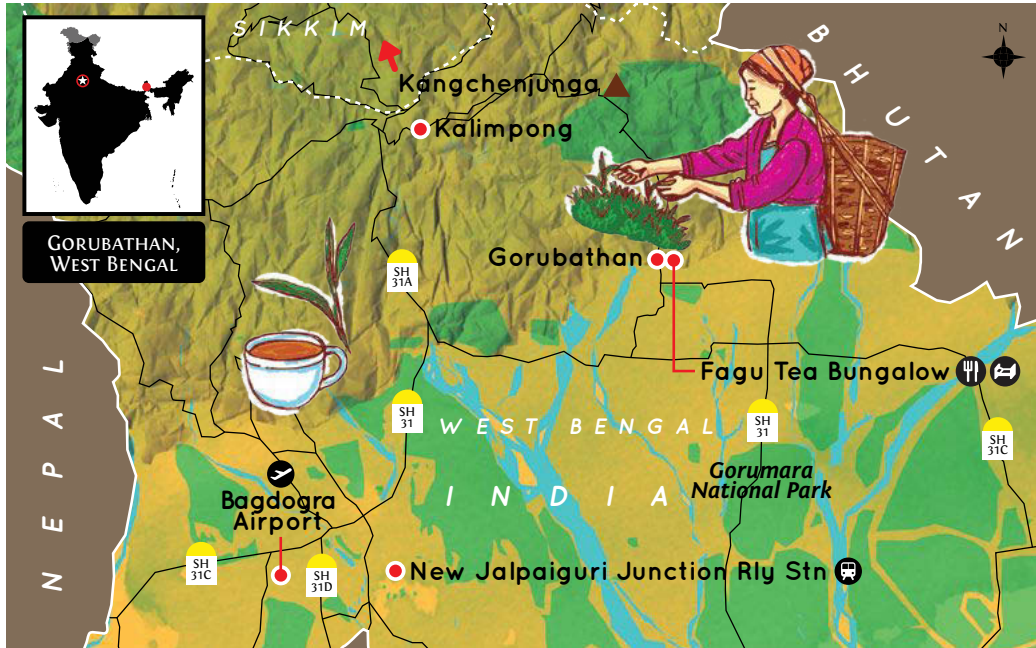
4. The dark and silent trails of the Gorumara National Park (see 'Day-trip' on the next page)

in the forest that was once the army's look-out point over Bhutan.

The hill-station of **Lava**, with its beautiful monastery, is just a 10km drive from here, but this is where the trifecta ends. Because beyond this lies civilisation. This tourist-friendly town might be your chance to escape the world of nylon curtains and grubby food served in chipped bowls and give in to the pleasures of non-thready towels, but if you truly want to discover new territory and tread new paths, you'll stay put and not let a little nylon stand in your way.

**WORDS** SHARAN SAIKUMAR  
**PHOTOGRAPHS** KRISHNA ANGIRA



**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

**Closest metro:** Kolkata (635km)

**Closest town:** Darjeeling (100km)

**Closest airport:** Bagdogra (80km) is the only airport here. There are regular flights from Kolkata to Bagdogra (return fares from ₹ 5,200). SpiceJet, IndiGo, Jet Airways and Air India fly here.

**Closest railhead:** New Jalpaiguri Railway Station (NJP; 70km) is served by several trains from both Howrah and Sealdah. The 12343 Darjeeling Mail makes for a convenient overnight

journey (leaves Sealdah [SDAH] 10.05pm, arrives NJP at 8am; ₹ 910 Third AC). Return by the 12346 Saraighat Express (leaves NJP 7.25pm, arrives Howrah Junction [HWH] 5.10am; ₹ 910 Third AC).

**GETTING AROUND**

This place is at the back of beyond. A car of your own and a confident local driver are musts – if you're hiring a car, pick an SUV. We travelled with and liked **Clubside Tours and Travels Pvt Ltd** (00-91-33-22647053; clubside.in, enquiry@clubside.in; from ₹ 3,400/ day/ non-AC Sumo).

**WHERE TO STAY**

**Jhandi Eco Huts:** The concrete rooms at Jhandi Eco Huts are very basic. But the 14 eco huts are spread over a hillside, mean that you have grand views of Mt Kanchendzonga. The rooms come with nothing more fancy than a geyser and warm velvety blankets. The local tourists tend to get noisy around the campfires, so take a room far away. Be warned: this place experiences frequent power cuts (00-91-9433346189; jhandiecohut.com, jhandiecohut@gmail.com; Upper Lungsel, Gorubathan; ₹ 1,700/ night; meals ₹ 400/ person/ day).

**Fagu Tea Bungalow:** This is the kind of place an English *sahib* left behind after Independence. It looks like it belongs to the British but inside it's all Indian. The beautiful 100-year-old bungalow has gone *desi* with Bengali meals, a harried cook and strictly functional cutlery. The once-lavish rooms

are now dormitories, but the hospitality is warm and the tea is really good (reservations: 00-91-33-25600031; heritagebungalows.com, booking@heritagebungalows.com; Fagu Bungalow Rd, Lower Fagu Tea Garden; ₹ 2,990/ night; ₹ 450/ person/ meal).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Welcome to the land of chicken curry and rice, Bengali style. Yes, there'll be fish, too, but the staple here is chicken and it's at every meal. **Fagu Tea Bungalow** does it accompanied with a *dal* and fairly well-cooked veggies while **Jhandi Eco Huts** does it on the barbecue. At Jhandi, don't expect culinary feats as the Bengali food is made by sweet Nepali boys who try their best but fall woefully short. The chowmein and the barbecue, however, are pretty good. In Gorubathan village, between Jhandi and Fagu, you'll get some lovely, freshly-made *momos* at a shack at the Chel riverside that make

for great river-picnic food (from 9am; ₹ 20/ plate).

**WHAT TO PACK**

A pair of sturdy walking shoes and layered clothing for the fast-changing weather that can go from misty in the tea gardens, to freezing in the mountains and scorching in the jungles

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

The drive from Bagdogra to Gorubathan is a short one so you won't need a loo break.

**SAFETY**

The only thing that's dangerous in these parts are the roads, because they have the nasty habit of pulling a disappearing act. Driving after dark in this area is a seriously bad idea because the climb is steep and street lights don't exist.

**MEDICAL AID**

You're in pretty good hands if you have a minor ailment at the tea estates, which come with their own dispensaries run by the village doctor. For a more professional approach, you'll have to take a trip to **Malbazar Subdivisional Hospital** in Jalpaiguri (70km).

**CHILD-FRIENDLINESS**

This trip, full of adventure as it is, might not be the kind of adventure kids will like. If you stick to the tea estates and forests, take the kids along for the tea factory trips and jungle rides. The terrain in Jhandi is too rocky.

**DAY-TRIP**

\* **Gorumara National Park**, famed for the greater one-horned rhinoceros and leopards makes for a good day-trip (35km; 6am – 8am, 3pm – 5pm; entry: ₹ 1,500/ two with a Gypsy and guide). Pick the evening safari, because even if the rhino proves temperamental and the Indian hornbill elusive, you can have the fun of stalking them in an open-top Gypsy and witnessing a gorgeous sunset while you're at it. There are two ticketing offices. Avoid the one offering a 'watchtower' drop to the jungle, which involves long waiting times. The jungle safari is a much better idea, but you have to go personally to book your safari – there are no phone or online booking options. Get there by 2.30pm and you should be able to get yourself on the 3pm ride.



# 3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK. A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



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## Alibaug, Maharashtra

### LOSE YOURSELF

Alibaug is a unicorn. It's hard to believe that an hour-long boat ride on a Friday afternoon can transport you to a tranquil seaside enclave when it's likely you've otherwise spent much more time in Mumbai's traffic trying to get home.

But that's not the only reason Alibaug is Mumbai's easiest trip. Once a retreat for the posh and famous, it has evolved into a far more egalitarian getaway without losing any of its loveliness. The sleepy hamlets dotting the coast from Awas all the way to Murud provide delightful stay options for every budget, the local cuisine is a treat, especially for seafood lovers, and it offers something for everybody whether

you're after lazy, sun-soaked days or myriad outdoor activities.

Alight the ferry at Mandwa Jetty and, if you can't wait too much longer to decompress, just a short ride away is [Mango Beach House – The Spa @ Awas](#), a hip boutique resort with an enticing pool merely a few steps away from its eight ochre cottages (see *Where to Stay* for all details). Alternate between relaxing in the deckchairs and hanging in floral hammocks, only leaving your perch for a quick dip or a decadent spa session.

If you're looking for something a bit more private, drive to Kashid. Not too far from the beautiful beach are [Raintree](#) and [Dolce](#), two high-end villas within one

Above: [Gulzar Homestay](#) offers the perfect getaway for friends or families

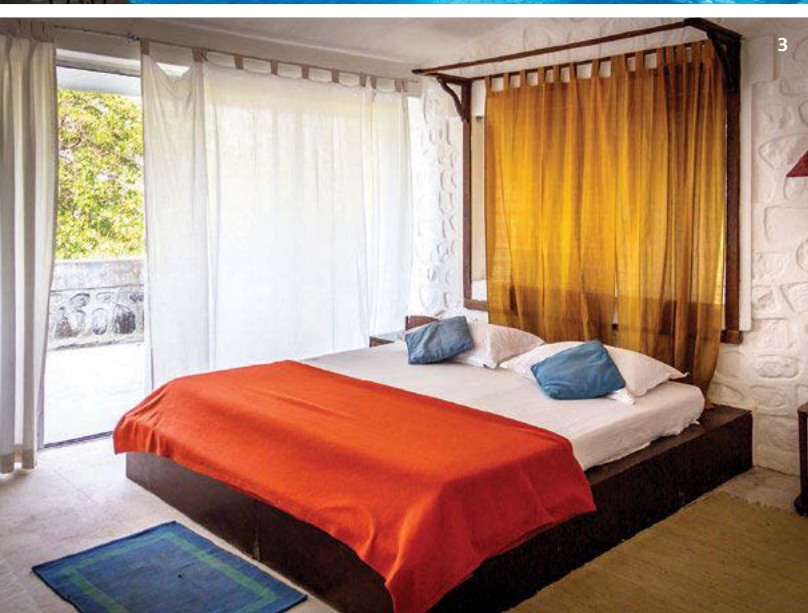
Below: Ocean-inspired ceramics for sale at [Nostalgia](#)

property, sharing little except ivy covering and a turquoise pool. Raintree is magnificent, built from natural materials with exposed beams and stained-glass windows, while Dolce is far more modern with the prettiest little porch.

If you've had an easy week, head further along the coast and follow the cactus-lined dirt road that leads to [Mahua Baug](#). You're likely to be joined by the goofy resident dogs as you trek around the sprawling mango plantation. The palm-fringed sea view from atop is worth the uphill journey while a stroll down to the creek offers a picturesque slice of coastal village life. Reward yourself for either effort with a generous dinner in the leafy







**GREAT FROM**  
Mumbai, Pune

**GREAT FOR**  
Serious unwinding.

**GO NOW**  
To make the most of the summer as the rains make Alibaug accessible only by road, and beaches are unsafe.

garden and, as night falls, some stargazing. If you're keen on bird-watching, choose from different well-marked walking trails at [Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary](#) (6am – 6pm; ₹ 30 adult, ₹ 15 child).

Another highlight of the region is the impressive 15th-century [Murud-Janjira Fort](#), on a blackened, brooding island in the middle of the ocean (₹ 800/45-minute tour, split by a group). Round up a large enough group of visitors at Khora Bandar and the boats will ply (7am – 6pm, the last boat departs for the mainland at 6pm; approx ₹ 1,000 split by a group). Once inside, a guide will lead you through the cannon-mounted watch towers and ruins, and show you secret entrances and freshwater lakes in what was effectively once a functional village within the impregnable fort walls.

For travellers with the desire to disconnect entirely, there's [Gulzar](#)

1. The pool is only metres away from your doorstep at [Mango Beach House – The Spa @ Awas](#)
2. Stroll, relax and swim at the peaceful beach near [Gulzar Homestay](#)
3. Bright curtains and bedsheets liven up the older rooms at [Mahua Bagh](#)
4. Enjoy your cuppa on the swing at [Mahua Bagh](#)
5. Don't miss the home-style Konkani cuisine at the local [khanavals](#) (eateries)

[Homestay](#), where the cellphone signal is a thing of the past (or future). The hideaway is thoughtfully-decorated with antiques and curiosities, and a kiln on the verandah for the ceramic workshops they sometimes conduct (Mar – Nov). You'll probably want to choose a book from the library and read in the perfect bay window – but only until you step outside. At one end of the garden is a fabulous beach, with soft white sand and pretty shell trails. It's the real reason you came – to sunbathe, swim, stretch and do little else.

**WORDS** SHEENA DABHOLKAR  
**PHOTOGRAPHS** SUPRIYA KANTAK



**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

**Closest metro:** Mumbai (95km) is around three hours away via Navi Mumbai, but the quickest way over is via ferry from the Gateway of India, which takes about an hour to reach Mandwa Jetty and includes a bus ride into town (8am – 6pm; PNP catamaran from ₹ 150, Maldar catamaran from ₹ 110).

**Closest airport:** Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (106km)

**Closest railhead:** Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (104km)

**GETTING AROUND**

Though auto rickshaws are available locally (agree on a price beforehand), it's far more advisable to have your own transport in Alibaug. We used and liked the services of **Anfa Travels** (00-91-98213 52189; ₹ 2,800/ day). Bike rentals are available from **Bike for Rent** (00-91-7738334852; opp Hotel Ravi Kiran, Rewas Rd; 9am – 8pm; from ₹ 400/ Activa).

**WHERE TO STAY**

**Mango Beach House – The Spa @ Awas:** The biggest draws at this all-inclusive resort are the kid-friendly pool and the therapies offered by trained spa specialists (00-91-9820007766; [mangoalibaug.com](http://mangoalibaug.com), [mangoalibaug@gmail.com](mailto:mangoalibaug@gmail.com); Awas Nageshwar Mandir Rd; from ₹ 9,500 with all meals, spa therapies from ₹ 500).

**Raintree and Dolce:** Splurge and rent one or both of these stunning private villas, perfect for quietly celebrating a special occasion (00-91-9021790217; [weekendplan.in](http://weekendplan.in), [sales@weekendplan.in](mailto:sales@weekendplan.in); Kashid, ahead of Prakruti Resort; from ₹ 20,000/ four adults for Dolce, ₹ 20,000/ two adults for Raintree, rates include breakfast).

**Mahua Bagh:** The new rooms are ironically more rustic but with swanky outdoor and indoor showers. The property's topmost old room offers stunning views in lieu of running hot water (00-91-8585983456; [mahuaresorts.com](http://mahuaresorts.com),

[mahuaibagh@gmail.com](mailto:mahuaibagh@gmail.com); 2nd right at Mohra bus stop, 7km before Murud; ₹ 6,500 with all meals).

**Gulzar Homestay:** It has none of the modcons, but this characterful homestay is great value for money and is perfect for a family or group of friends as the upstairs bedrooms share facilities. You can cook your own dinner or have the homestay organise it for you (00-91-8097390997; [gulzarhomestay.com](http://gulzarhomestay.com), [info@gulzarhomestay.com](mailto:info@gulzarhomestay.com); Danda Village, Salay – Murud Highway, Nandgaon Post, Murud Taluka; ₹ 4,000 for the large room with ensuite bathroom, ₹ 3,000 each for smaller rooms with common bathrooms, rates include breakfast).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Eating local is the way to go in these parts and the home-style Konkani cuisine won't disappoint. You won't want to venture too far for meals, so head to **Prasanna Lunch Home**

A local fisherwoman peddles the day's catch near Murud Beach

(00-91-9921550607; at Post Kihim Beach; 7.30am – 11pm; fish thali: ₹ 300, veg thali: ₹ 125) and **Kasar Khanaval** (00-91-9226240821; near Kashid Beach; 8.30am – 10.30pm; surmai fry: ₹ 180/ plate, pomfret thali: ₹ 300). Further south, snag a table in the coconut grove at the popular **Patil Khanawal** before or after the fort visit for excellent thalis (00-91-9423377027; Subhashchandra Rd, Murud-Janjira; 7.30am – 12am; mutton thali: ₹ 160, veg thali: ₹ 100, surmai thali from ₹ 300). The pickle plate here warrants a mention, as does the free wi-fi. Early risers can have *poha* and omelettes for breakfast.

**WHAT TO PACK**

Mosquito repellent, sunscreen, binoculars, a hat, sensible walking shoes, swimwear for the pool and beach

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

The McDonalds at Kalamboli is your best bet for a half decent loo when driving down to or from Alibaug.

**SHOPPING**

**Nostalgia**, a home-decor and lifestyle store, is the perfect pitstop if you've forgotten to pack swimwear or beachwear. Most of the products are Indonesian imports so expect Buddha busts, wooden sculptures and delicate island-inspired curios (00-91-2141-247701; [nostalgialifestyle.in](http://nostalgialifestyle.in); Shop 1,047/ 946, at Post Zirad, Mandwa Rd; 9.30am – 6.30pm; home accessories from ₹ 500).

**SAFETY**

Alibaug is generally safe, although women might want to avoid going solo.

**MEDICAL AID**

**Dr Mhatre's Clinic** can handle minor ailments (00-91-2141-232227; Main Rd, Chondi Village). In case of a major medical emergency, make your way back to Mumbai.

**CHILD-FRIENDLINESS**

All the activities and accommodation are well suited for children. Supervise kids at the beach and in the pool.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

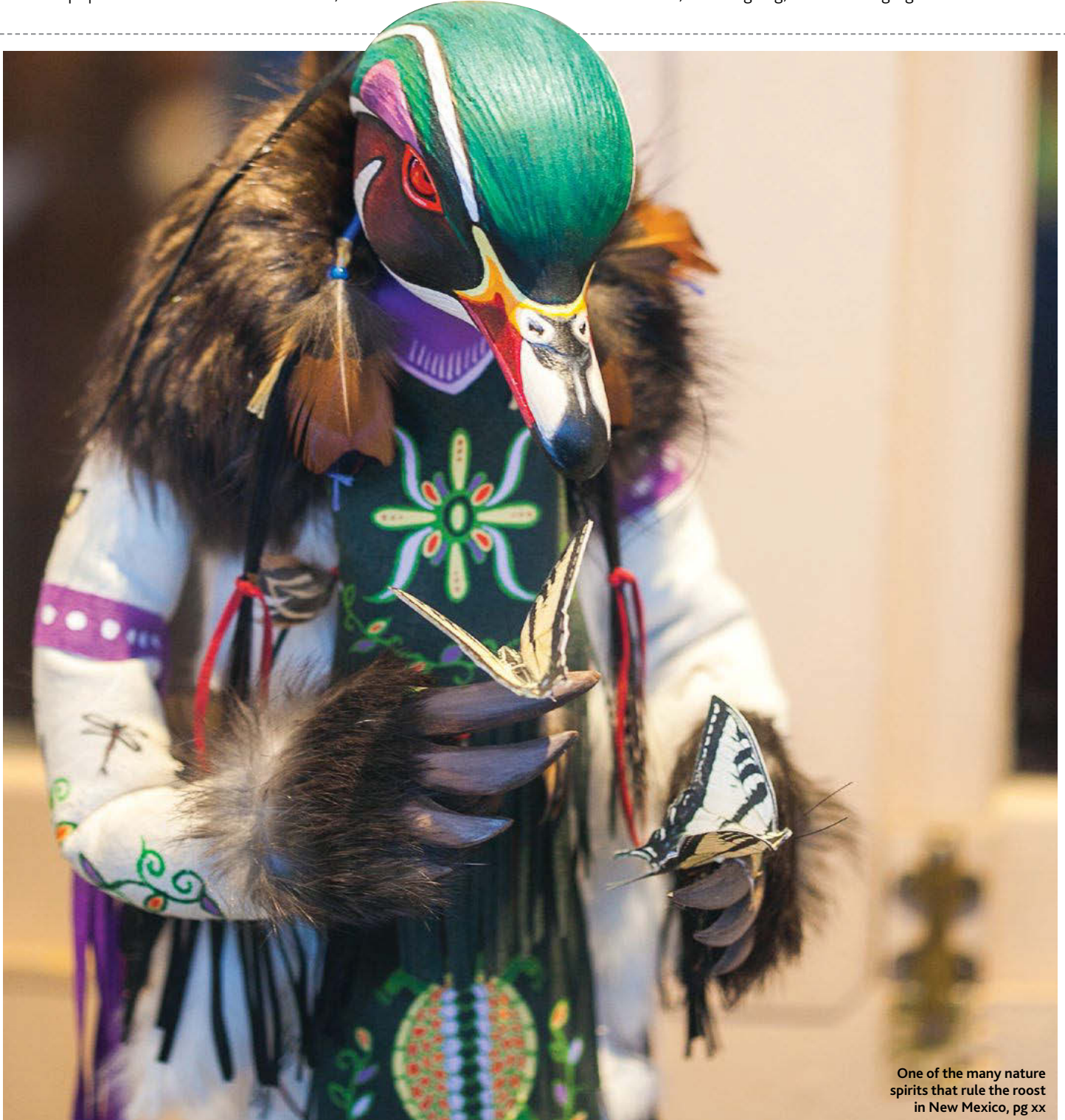
- \* Ferries don't operate in the monsoon or when the seas are rough.
- \* Early mornings are best for treks and bird-watching. Remember to take drinking water along with you.





# Features

**PG 64** Look beyond the tulips and space brownies – **The Netherlands** has a whole lot more to offer | **PG 80** With ancient tribes, incredible chocolates and TV-star aliens, **New Mexico** is a treasure worth discovering | **PG 92** Follow our itinerary to discover the secrets that **Madhya Pradesh** keeps | **PG 106** Now that the war's over, **north-east Sri Lanka** beckons with the bucolic, the intriguing, and miles of gorgeous coastline



PHOTOGRAPH: UNNIKRISHNAN RAVEENDRANATHEN

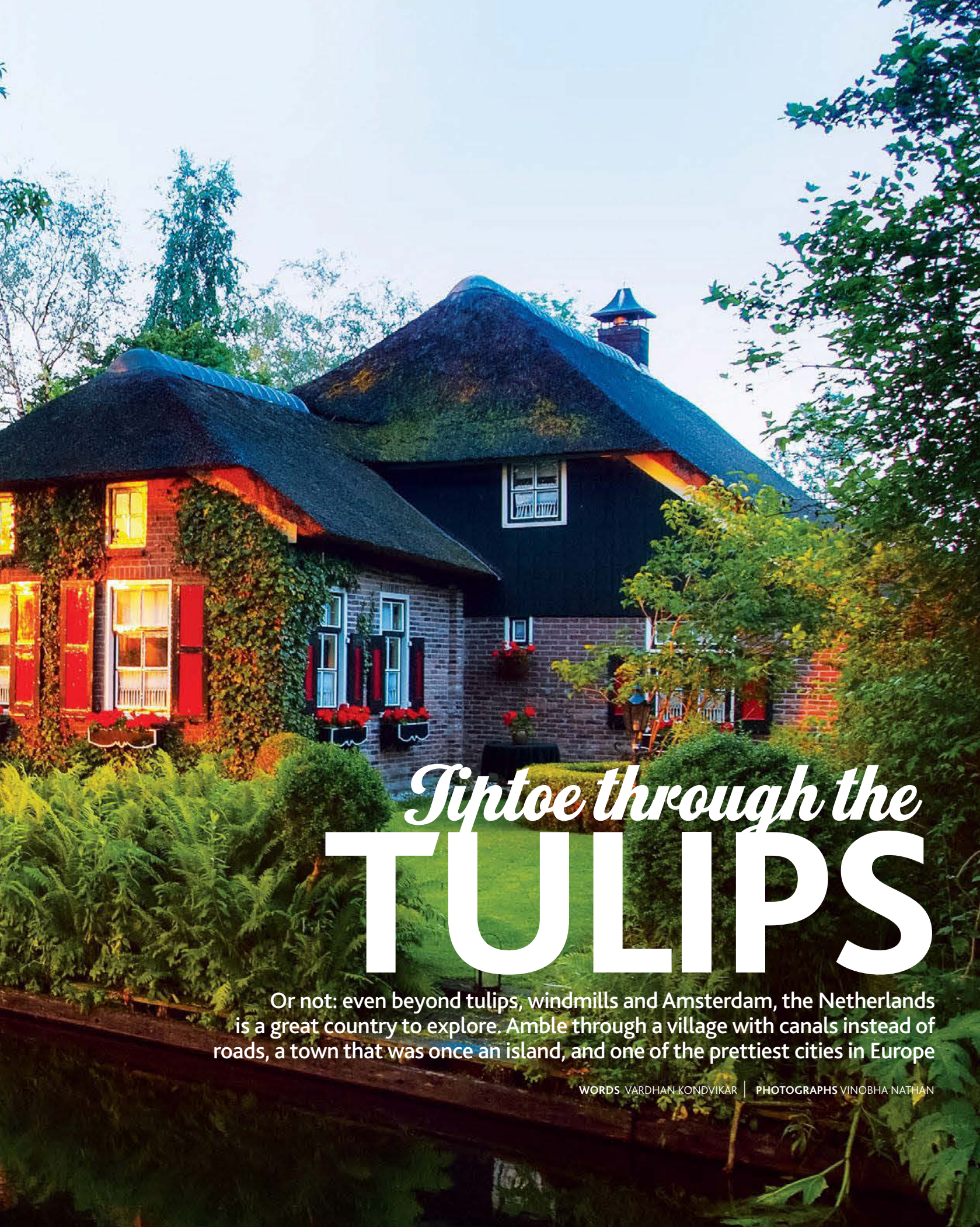
One of the many nature spirits that rule the roost in New Mexico, pg xx





Giethoorn, with its canals and adorable houses, is a great spot for a honeymoon





# *Tiptoe through the* **TULIPS**

Or not: even beyond tulips, windmills and Amsterdam, the Netherlands is a great country to explore. Amble through a village with canals instead of roads, a town that was once an island, and one of the prettiest cities in Europe

WORDS VARDHAN KONDIKAR | PHOTOGRAPHS VINOBHA NATHAN

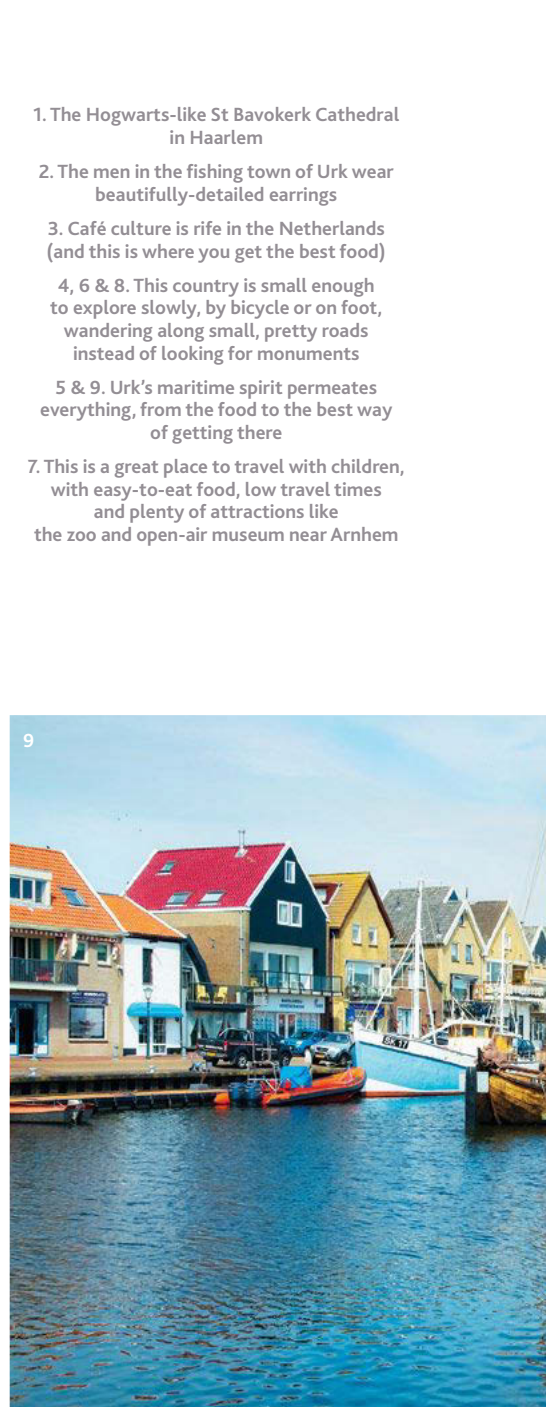
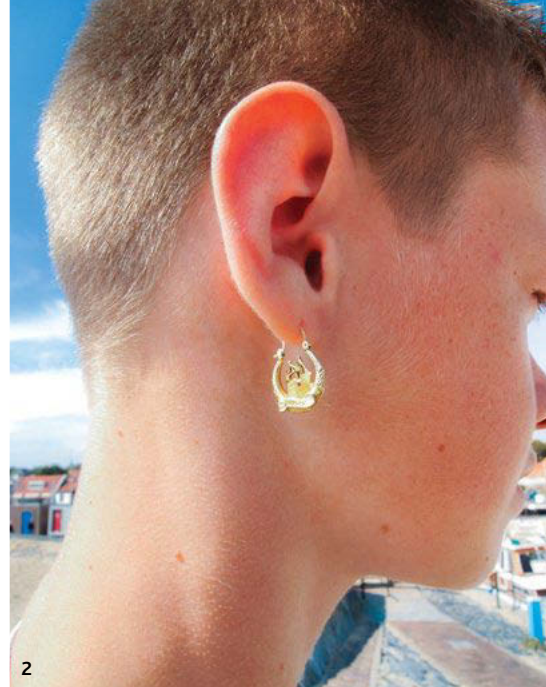
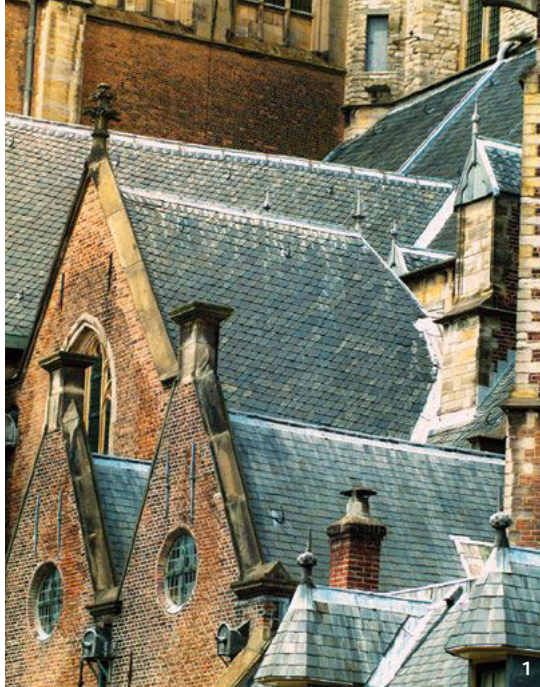


T

HE Netherlands, to me, is Europe. Yes, there's *Tales of Toyland* scenery in the Alps, and more Enid Blyton stuff in the Cotswolds, but on the 13-year-old that I was, on my first trip abroad, going to see where my dad was from, this place left quite an impression. This was the quintessential Europe I'd read about, with cobbled streets and pretty houses crammed up against each other, with strange grey weather and almost celebratory bursts of sunshine. This was the Europe where your tummy started to ache because you'd clenched it against the cold so long, a place where you'd leave the country if you drove for two hours in any direction. This was the Europe I'd seen in my *World Car Guides*, with tiny Peugeots and bright yellow Fiats and the very curvy Opel Tigra, cars with no air-conditioning but a heater that you really, really needed. It was the novelty of left-hand drive, of back-pedal brakes on bicycles (and bicycle lanes, of all things!), the even-greater novelty of people driving carefully without honking. The greater novelty still of signs in a different language, of not being at home any more.

I'd never eaten food like this, delicious little *kroketten* in buns, washed down with chocolate milk (and *no one* does chocolate milk like the Dutch). I'd never seen stairs so ridiculously steep that I went down them on my butt the first time I tried. I'd never seen such tiny bathrooms, never heard of the idea that you'd keep a plant in there, or a calendar so you could think up birthday gifts for people while you did your business (and that you, um, could admire your, um, handiwork in the strangely-designed WCs). This was Europe, in all its delightful, just-right perfection, in its alienness, its sheer cuteness.

Europe isn't complete without the Netherlands, without its canals and football and its cows. And the thing about the Netherlands is that it doesn't end at Amsterdam. The capital, like big cities anywhere, is its own planet, its own culture of weird norms and hash bars and red-light districts. Step outside, and it's a different world. To a gawping teenager who forgot to look at freckly Dutch girls because he was looking so hard at everything, this was perfection. This was big. So please excuse me while I take you to my Holland, the place that changed my childhood, to my Europe. →



1. The Hogwarts-like St Bavokerk Cathedral in Haarlem
2. The men in the fishing town of Urk wear beautifully-detailed earrings
3. Café culture is rife in the Netherlands (and this is where you get the best food)
- 4, 6 & 8. This country is small enough to explore slowly, by bicycle or on foot, wandering along small, pretty roads instead of looking for monuments
- 5 & 9. Urk's maritime spirit permeates everything, from the food to the best way of getting there
7. This is a great place to travel with children, with easy-to-eat food, low travel times and plenty of attractions like the zoo and open-air museum near Arnhem









## Haarlem

You like Amsterdam, yes? That's no reason to not go an hour away to a perfect, golden little city: Haarlem is full of perfect corners and a sleepy air that sets it totally apart from the capital. You have to start at the **Grote of Sint-Bavokerk**, the big cathedral, because it's beautiful. I have to start there because it's beautiful, and because my dad lived there.

Yes, he did, actually. His father was caretaker, and the family tumbled all through this gorgeous building, living in 16th-century rooms, playing hide-and-seek in the nooks that line the spacious nave, and um, occasionally cycling on the smooth-worn gravestones that form the floor. This, naturally, was not known to the authorities (the cycling I mean, I presume they knew about the graves), because the Dutch used to take their Calvinism very seriously. This Swiss Protestant concept was a straight-laced one: the lovely large windows you see on the houses here were meant for pedestrians to peek and see that no one was sinning inside. It's true. It also meant that the St Bavokerk, a mini-Hogwarts from the outside, is austere inside, very simply decorated apart from the grand pipe organ at one end (which Mozart once played on, when he was 10). It doesn't have the richness of a Roman cathedral, but it does have atmosphere: walk past the wooden 'mourning shields', bask in the light from the stained-glass windows, walk on the graves and pretend that the shiver running down your spine is from the cold air. And look for grave number 7: it's believed this is the grave of a man who used to hit his mother – the copper plate on it was installed because his hand started growing from the grave...

The city the cathedral served, Haarlem, grew into a very prosperous little town, exacting tolls from ships going to and from the North Sea, and its good looks only improved with time. Major industry moved out after WWII, leaving behind the cathedral, with a sunny market square, and a maze

of cobbled streets leading off that, now lined with expensive-looking shops. This is a city to walk around in, your head pinwheeling as you try to take in the sculpted façades of little houses here, a postcard-perfect view down a narrow, deeply European street or of the **de Adriaan windmill** by the river, or a sudden glimpse of the cathedral as it sneaks into your camera frame. This is a city to watch from a café, with the small beer they call a *kleintje*, washing down a big pile of that North Sea invention, french fries with mayo.

And it's a city where you go looking for *hofjes*. These little walled gardens, invisible from the outside and accessible through little wooden doors, were charity houses: in exchange for all your remaining possessions, the homeless and single women and widows could live here and work, protected from the outside world. Some are still active, others are now residences, and all of them are beautiful – cosy little courtyards that look perfect in the springtime. Europe likes its houses pretty: where we have semi-torn posters for films called *Sajanwa Anadi*, *Sajaniya Khiladi*, they have little pots with red and blue flowers; even their bicycles, parked casually against a stone wall, look better than our *doodhwala* bikes, leaning against the washing drying outside. And here is where you'll feel closest to 'normal' life in Europe, among people just doing their thing through age-old structures, here is where you'll see why I think this country is so totally European.

And one last thing about Haarlem: you know the story of little Hans, the boy who plugged the dike with his finger? Dikes protected the Netherlands from the sea; a 19th-century tale tells of a little boy who found a tiny leak in the dike outside Haarlem, and plugged it with his finger till he was found, the leak fixed, and Haarlem saved from a deluge. My father assures us it was him, but we remain suspicious. →





3



4



5

1, 2 & 4. The *hofs* (walled residences around gardens) and back alleys of Haarlem have a wonderful sleepy, cosy air 3. A *kroket* is a great, cheap, filling snack – and will probably make up the majority of your daytime meals here. Goes beautifully with beer or chocolate milk (and is a good excuse to sit down during a long walk) 5 & 6. The grand organ and austere interior of the St Bavokerk – watch out for those graves! 7. Chilling out on the market square outside the St Bavokerk



6



7









1. Schoonhoven, "silver town", is off the beaten track, and a good place to see a completely non-touristy Holland 2. Quiet and rural it may be, but Schoonhoven has close to the greatest concentration of windmills in the Netherlands: go ahead and take all the selfies you've dreamed of 3. Schoonhoven was once a fortified city, and remnants of its medieval past can still be found around town Facing page: Bicycles, *fietsen*, are a way of life here: watch out for the back-pedal brakes!

## Schoonhoven

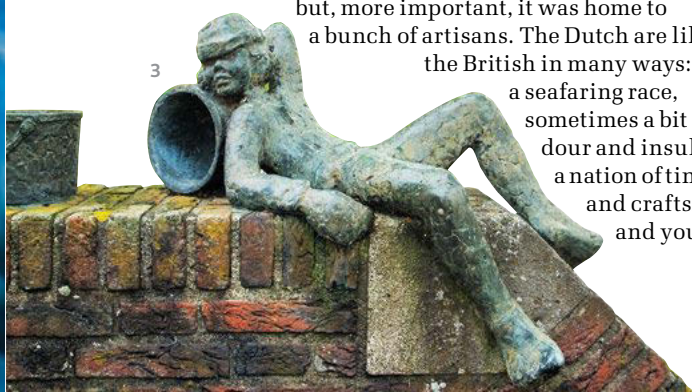
So, what does Netherlands mean? Low land, that's what, a country that was largely reclaimed from the sea, and a country constantly at risk from the sea and the River Rhine, which keep insisting they want it back. The heroes of the Dutch resistance are the windmills and the dikes; the windmills were the pumps that sucked the water out and later ground grain and milled pigment, and the dikes, the long walls that line coastal towns, kept the water out. You'll see a fair bit of this in Schoonhoven (s-kh-own-ho-fen), a little town that keeps the water out by means of a large sluice gate – this was a ferry point, and the entrance to the Lek River, but, more important, it was home to a bunch of artisans. The Dutch are like the British in many ways: a seafaring race, sometimes a bit dour and insular, a nation of tinkers and craftsmen, and you'll see

### Fries with mayonnaise

The Belgians claim to have invented french fries, but they and the Dutch still bicker about who decided to put mayonnaise on them. Silky, creamy and available everywhere, it's a great change from ketchup.



this in the intricate work at the main museum. Silver abounds here, fretted and polished (one of the characters in Bertie Wooster's universe has a thing for famous Dutch silverware), as does gold, and a host of clocks. This, however, is not a town to go around looking for things to do: it's better, if you have a car, to drive around here, buying the excellent cheese off local farms, staying in a tiny B&B overlooking a canal (vastly more affordable than in Amsterdam); this works as a great base for exploring **Kinderdijk**, the UNESCO-listed collection of windmills outside Rotterdam. Alternately, you could go drop in at my friends, Koos and Houkje, who are lovely people and didn't need me around, but who very happily welcomed me into their home and their garden, with its delightful pond, and showed me around, from the town's tulip gardens to the **Veerpoort**, the last remaining medieval gate of this once-fortified city. And hey, they're great India fans, and might very well offer you a beer. →





# Arnhem

You don't hear much about the Dutch during World War II. Yes, you hear about Anne Frank, of course, but less about Miep Gies, the woman who hid the Frank family and kept safe Anne's diary, or of Corrie ten Boom, the lady from Haarlem who similarly hid Jews in a secret room in her house, and whose father, a local official, obtained a hundred ration cards to give out to Jews. Largely, this lack of information is because the Dutch were very quickly overrun by the Nazis, and lived under their thumb till the end of the war. One little finger of land, though, was part of one of the bravest fiascos in the war, Operation Market Garden.

In 1944, with the Allies and the Soviets closing in on Germany, Field Marshal Montgomery came up with a daring plan to land paratroopers around Arnhem, close to the modern German border, to seize bridges behind the German frontlines, which could be used to bring in Allied tanks and cut off the Ruhr, the German industrial heartland, and even reach the port of Antwerp in Belgium. It went off beautifully at first – around Arnhem, Nijmegen and Eindhoven, the Germans were rapidly driven out, and the 'liberated' towns celebrated. Some of the celebrations were grim: collaborators with the Germans were publicly punished, women, in particular, were shamed, their heads shaven. It looked like the war could end by Christmas. But poor planning, bad weather and fierce German

## Jenever

The father of gin, *jenever* (yay-nay-fer) is vodka-like and flavoured with juniper. It's available as smoother *jonge* (young) and more flavourful *oude* (old), and traditionally comes in lovely earthenware bottles.



resistance ended the assault, and Nazi rule closed over the Dutch again.

During this bleak period, the Netherlands suffered. Reprisals were brutal: many Dutch were killed outright, and some 20,000 died the following winter, when the Germans stopped food supplies from reaching the region. And, all the time, the remaining Allied paratroopers, mostly American, had to hide. Today, many Dutch families still keep a portrait of "their American soldier."

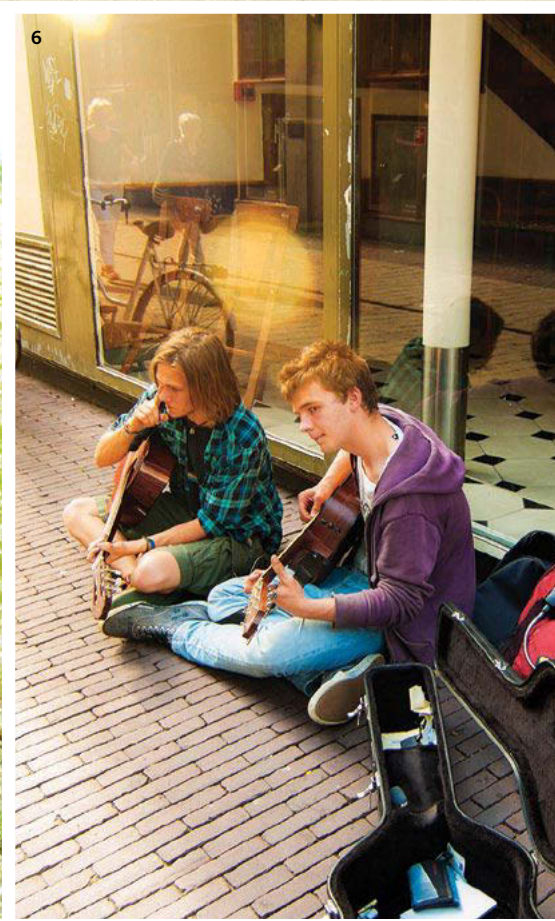
The **Airborne Museum 'Hartenstein'** is a dramatic, moving affair, with videos, animatronics and plenty of information, and is absolutely worth a visit. There are recreations of hiding places, of the battles themselves, a monument to an unsuccessful but no less courageous event in the war.

Arnhem today is a pleasant city – the bridge, so important in the battle, was bombed and has been replaced by a lookalike – and it's a nice place to explore. Kids, probably bawling after the dramatic museum, should be taken to the very nice zoo (and possibly left there, depending on behaviour), which lies in the pretty Veluwe Nature Reserve. Next to that is the **Netherlands Open Air Museum**, a recreation of older Dutch ways – you can walk through houses and mills, even ride a little tram – a good half-day, especially if it's sunny. Interestingly, in a display of the ingrained resistance spirit, the locals flooded the gates of the museum when the government tried shutting it down in 1987. →

1 & 3. The war museum is poignant and sometimes chilling, giving you an idea of life under Nazi occupation, particularly during and after Operation Market Garden  
2, 5 & 7. The Arnhem zoo and surrounds are a great place to go with the family, with lots of cute animals and even a petting zoo area  
4. Arnhem lies in the scenic Veluwe region, which is great for light hikes and cycling trips  
6. Arnhem today has been completely rebuilt, and is a young, fun, lively town











1



2

1. Giethoorn is chock-full of cute Dutch houses to wander among 2, 6 & 7. In Giethoorn, your entire life is on the water, from your transport to your friends to the restaurants you go to 3 & 8. Staying on a dairy farm outside Giethoorn is a good way to get two Dutch experiences in one, and gives you incredibly fresh cheese and milk every morning 4 & 5. Paddling along the canals gives you an awful thirst: sit down for a beer, some cold drinks and a *kroket* or two

## Giethoorn

The Dutch feel a little aggrieved whenever people tell them how cool Venice is, with all its canals. Gnashing their teeth, they point out that Amsterdam has more canals, hell, all of Holland is positively riven with the things, and they even have a village that has no roads at all, only canals, and just how does Venice compare with that, eh? Well, no, Giethoorn does not have the grandeur and history of Venice, but it is so utterly fetching it deserves a place in fairytales. It does have roads, but only lanes fit for walking or cycling – the best way to get around is by boat, on canals lined with houses and gardens so utterly adorable you feel there simply have to be pixies lurking under the bushes, brown rabbits piloting little trains underground. Anything else would be a let-down, such is the sweetness of this place. And while grand honeymoons work in Venice, the cosy, hand-holding bit works better still over here, especially in the evening sunlight, when the day-tourists have left. This is slow-travel central.

You can stay in the village, or just outside, as we did, on a little farm, where everything is cheerfully done in sign-language, and you eat farm-fresh cheese amid the warm smells of cows and molasses. You find black-and-white cows lazing in the fields, or patiently walking

themselves to the milking machines when they feel the need, and you realise what a dairy country this is.

You could use Holland as a live textbook for children when you teach them about life on a farm.

In Giethoorn itself, you can rent a paddle-boat of your own, or join a guided tour on a motorboat, and it's lovely either way. You can also use a kayak to explore the backwaters of the **De Weerribben** (Wieden National Park), but trust me, you'll keep coming back to Giethoorn, just to splish past a little cottage, or under a head-high bridge, one more time.

Alternatively, rent a bicycle and do things the way the Dutch do – watch the back-pedal brakes, which can have you in a canal if you forget the procedure in a moment of crisis.

Of course, falling into a canal is a good excuse to haul yourself to one of the little restaurants in the village, to order a glass of innocent-looking but lethal *jenever*.

And then, damp but filled with a glowing heat, lean against a bridge in the red-gold sunlight, watch the village slowly light up and empty out, and you'll understand why the Dutch get annoyed at those Italians. →

### Appelmoes

Pronounced apple mousse, this is an apple sauce that's used as a topping for savoury food, from roast beef to chicken to fries, and provides a sweet, tangy balance; ubiquitous here, it's difficult to find elsewhere.







3



4



5



6



7



8









1. The atmospheric town of Urk is great to walk around in, especially in the evenings 2. Het Oude Raadhuis museum shows (through slightly sinister mannequins) the bleakness and adventure of life in Urk in the past 3. Cosy seaside inns make a great place to down a *jenever* with some fish and chips after a windy walk 4. A *keeshond* is an intelligent, hardworking dog often seen on Dutch barges and boats

Facing page: You can paddle out of Giethoorn for a relaxed day in the De Weerribben nature reserve outside







1



2

1. Dutch children are invariably friendly – and delightfully bratty 2. Sunshine on the North Sea coast is an irresistible invitation to go outdoors and relax  
3. The lighthouse at Urk is a reminder of how fraught a life dependent on the sea can be

## Urk

So, I mentioned earlier that the Dutch were seafarers, but to say they went out to sea is like saying Tendulkar is a sort of cricketer. They were good at this, and, during the age of exploration, as big as the Spanish or English on the high seas. Don't forget that New York was once New Amsterdam, until they swapped that with the British – for Suriname. Funnily, you don't really notice the sea that much in Holland, with all mental images of the country centred around farms, tulips and cities, but, in the fishing town of Urk, you can't escape it.

Once an island, Urk became part of the mainland when the bay of the Zuider Zee was closed off and partly drained to turn it into the **IJsselmeer** lake, but it retains its differentness, a certain wildness. It looks outward to the North Sea instead of inland to the cows, it has its own dialect, with plenty of loan words from Yiddish. Its menfolk wear intricately-carved gold earrings, and there is the hopeful melancholy typical of towns that depend upon the sea, which can feed you on a good day, or turn you into a widow on a whim. It's a beautiful place in the sunshine, with a nautical air, bobbing yachts and the smell of batter-fried fish all round, but come a cold wind and the cries of the seagulls touch something ancient in you, a desire to go indoors and wrap up warm and hope that nature decides that today isn't the day to send a storm that can do

### Haring

*Haring* (herring) is a Dutch specialty – and a bit of an adventure to eat. Traditionally, it's served raw (mildly cured), with brine and chopped onions – and is eaten whole, holding it by the tail and lowering it into your mouth.




3



to the town what a wave does to a sandcastle. All of a sudden, you appreciate the stories of old sailors, you think of what George Clooney's character must have been thinking in *The Perfect Storm*, and the shipping museum **Het Oude Raadhuis** comes alive in a way it wouldn't have before.

Walk around this place, so different from the Netherlands you've seen so far, and you get more of a sense of its history, that even a place you can cross in two hours has so many different things in it. Here, you understand that Amsterdam and the tulips and windmills weren't created for Instagram, but have a purpose. Climb the steep streets, watch earringed children (both boys and girls) play among the houses that huddle together against the cold. Flip over a piece of golden-fried sole,

look around the wood-lined saloon you're sitting in, stare out over the water. Listen to the folktale that says that people in Urk are born on the Ommel-Bommel stone, a large rock offshore (usually told when the kiddies ask where babies come from), but that strangers are born from cabbages.

You get the sense that this place is weird, that this place is amazing. It isn't full of tourist attractions, but, for the traveller, especially someone willing to slow down, there's enough to soak in for a lifetime. The food here might not be haute cuisine, but a *kroket* with chocolate milk is irresistible, a raw herring filled with onions an adventure to boast about. And, best of all, you get the notion that this place was worth pumping some water out of. 

PHOTOGRAPH: M.G. MOOIJ / 123RF (HERRING)



## Essentials

### BEST TIME TO VISIT

The Netherlands has a typically North European climate, where winters can be freezing (December–February) and summers are mild (June–August). Spring (April–May) is when the tulips are in bloom, while fall (September–October) is ideal for avoiding the crowds. Carry an umbrella, for even spring and summer days see sudden showers.

### GETTING THERE

Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Jet Airways, Etihad, Lufthansa, Air India and KLM Royal Dutch fly to Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport from Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata with a layover. Return fares start at ₹ 42,000.

### GETTING AROUND

Hire a car and drive around the pretty Dutch countryside at your own pace. Choose from Hertz, Avis, Budget, Europcar and Sixt Rent a Car (from ₹ 4,500/day).

### VISA

Schedule an appointment for a Schengen visa to visit The Netherlands through VFS. The visa fees are ₹ 4,300 (VFS services charges: ₹ 788), and it takes about 15 working days to process. Get complete details at vfs-nl-in.com.

### EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, The Hague: indianembassy.nl

### CURRENCY

€ 1 = ₹ 67

### FURTHER READING

Read Lonely Planet's *The Netherlands* guide and find more information on holland.com, the country's official tourism website.

### VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

When you're missing home, head to **Ashoka**. The decor isn't the best, but it comes recommended for its *desi* food nevertheless, with plenty of vegetarian options (00-31-20-624-0066; ashokarestaurant.nl; Spuistraat 54; lunch: 12pm–3pm Fri–Sun, dinner: 5pm–11pm Mon–Sun; from ₹ 875).



## MAX OUT THE NETHERLANDS: THE IDEAL ITINERARY

**Days 1–3:** Fly into **Amsterdam** and spend three days exploring the city. Gorge on Chocomel and french fries with mayo at **Café Luxembourg** (00-31-20-620-6264; luxembourg.nl; Spui 24; 8am–late Mon–Fri, 9am–late Sat–Sun; from ₹ 300) and go to the excellent **Café Hoppe** on the Spui for coffee, appelgebak met slagroom (Dutch-style apple pie with whipped cream) and jenever (00-31-20-420-4420; cafehoppe.com; Spui 18-20; 8am–1am Sun–Thur, 8am–2am Fri–Sat; from ₹ 350). Stay at the **Hotel Seven Bridges**, a 300-year-old canal house with atmospheric rooms (00-31-20-623-1329; sevenbridgeshotel.nl/cms; amsterdam@hotelsevenbridges.com; Reguliersgracht 31; from ₹ 13,000).

**Days 4–5:** Drive to **Haarlem** (20km), which can be explored as a day trip from Amsterdam too. Check out the Gothic **Sint Bavokerk** (00-31-23-553-2040; bavo.nl; Grote Markt 22; 10am–4pm Mon–Sat) and its Christian Mueller organ, walk around the *hofjes* and visit the **Teylers Museum**, the Netherlands' first and oldest museum for its eccentric collection of fossils and old Masters (00-31-23-531-9010; teylersmuseum.nl; Spaarne 16; 10am–5pm Tues–Sat; ₹ 750). Eat at **Anne and Max**, a local favourite for its coffee, pies and sandwiches (00-31-23-707-4535; Zijlstraat 68; 8am–6pm; from ₹ 400) and don't miss **Haerlemsche Vlaamse**, for the very best *friet* (french fries) in town, with a dozen sauces to choose from (Spekstraat 3; from ₹ 300). Stay at the cosy **Bed and Breakfast Malts** on Zijlstraat, in the heart of Haarlem that offers free wi-fi and a great Dutch breakfast (00-31-23-551-2385; maltsotel.nl; Zijlstraat 5; from ₹ 4,450 with breakfast).

**Day 6:** Drive to **Schoonhoven** (80km) and check out the **clock museum** here (Kazarnaplein 4; 12pm–5pm Tues–Sun; ₹ 400), and the windmills at **Kinderdijk** (20km away; 00-31-78-691-2830; kinderdijk.com; Overwaard 2; 11am–4pm; ₹ 500 adult, ₹ 370 child). Eat at **Restaurant Lekkerr**, which serves interesting salads and dishes, and has a range of vegetarian options (00-31-18-238-7449; Haven 14/16; 4.30pm–9.30pm Mon–Fri, 12pm–10pm Sat, 12.30pm–9.30pm Sun; mains from ₹ 1,200). Stay at **Logies Oude Haven**, (00-31-64-402-4702; logiesoudehaven.nl; ramelieste@hetnet.nl; Oude Haven 19; from ₹ 4,100).

**Days 7–9:** Drive to **Arnhem** (87km). There's plenty to see here – start with the war museum, known as the **Airborne Museum 'Hartenstein'** (00-31-26-333-7710; en.airbornemuseum.nl; Utrechtseweg 232, Oosterbeek; timings vary; ₹ 575 adult, ₹ 375 child), and continue to the **Netherlands Open Air Museum** (00-31-26-357-6111; openairmuseum.nl; Hoeferlaan 4; timings vary; ₹ 1,075 adult, ₹ 800 child), and the **Burgers Zoo** (00-31-26-442-4534; burgerszoo.com; Antoon van Hooffplein 1; 9am–7pm summer, till 5pm winter; ₹ 1,300 adult, ₹ 1,200 child). Eat at **Graave**, a snug bistro that serves comfort food like pastas and burgers (00-31-26-445-7459; Little Haven 83; 12pm onwards Wed–Sun; from ₹ 900). Stay at the **Antonius Bed & Breakfast**, a historic townhouse with intimate rooms (00-31-65-123-9991; antoniusbnb.nl, info@antoniusbnb.nl; Sint Antonielaan 312-314; from ₹ 4,500).

**Days 10–11:** Drive to **Giethoorn** (112km). Rent a boat by yourself, or take a guided canal cruise; **Smit Giethoorn** comes recommended (00-31-52-136-1625; smitgiethoorn.nl; Zuiderpad 58 en 52; from ₹ 1,200), and discover the quiet beauty of Wieden National Park, **De Weerribben** (00-31-52-724-6644; np-weerribbenwieden.nl; Beulakerpad 1). Eat at **Grandcafé Fanfare**, recommended for its service and large portions (00-31-52-136-1600; Binnenpad 68; from 11am Wed–Mon; three-course menu from ₹ 1,700). Stay at **Hoeve Montigny Farm** (00-31-52-136-1483, 00-31-64-441-5703; hoevemontigny.nl, info@hoevemontigny.nl; Kanaaldijk 5; from ₹ 5,300).

**Days 12–13:** Drive to **Urk** (45km). Spend your days wandering around and eating *kroket*s with chocolate milk. Try the seafood at **Zeebodem** (00-31-52-768-3292; District 1-67; 10am–9pm Tues–Thur, till 10pm Fri–Sat; three-course menu from ₹ 1,700). Stay at **De Kaap** (00-31-52-768-1509; restaurantdekaap.nl, info@restaurantdekaap.nl; Visrestaurant de Kaap; Wijk 1-5; from ₹ 5,300).

**Day 14:** Leave for Amsterdam (85km) in time for your flight home.

## AMSTERDAM ESSENTIALS

Don't miss out on the experiences that the capital has to offer, apart from its more famous (and risqué) draws: The **Rijksmuseum**, with its lovely garden, is a must-visit, even apart from *Night Watch* (00-31-900-0745; rijksmuseum.nl; Museumstraat 1; 9am–5pm; ₹ 1,200). **Anne Frank House and Museum** is heart-breaking – book ahead to avoid huge queues (annefrank.org; Prinsengracht 263-267; timings vary; ₹ 600 adult, ₹ 300 child). The **Heineken Experience** is great fun (heinekenexperience.com; Stadhouderskade 78; 10.30am–7.30pm Mon–Thur, till 9pm Fri–Sun; ₹ 1,200). The **Nine Streets** is one of the nicest canal-side areas (de9straatjes.nl). A **canal cruise** is an excellent primer for Amsterdam; the evening cruises are probably best (*Blue Boat Company*: 00-31-20-679-1370; blueboat.nl; Stadhouderskade 30; from ₹ 1,100 adult, ₹ 500 child).





Beautiful, dramatic Native American themes are everywhere in Santa Fe's art



# FAR FROM ANY ROAD

New Mexico is an arid, evocative  
wonderland of creepy stories,  
vanished peoples and warm,  
beautiful architecture

WORDS VARDHAN KONDIKAR  
PHOTOGRAPHS UNNIKRISHNAN RAVEENDRANATHEN







1. Art in Santa Fe, like this chipmunk-headed depiction of a nature spirit, is always lovely, but decidedly surreal

2. The red-brown Pueblo Revival architecture is livened up by colourful murals

3. A Pueblo tribal woman who sold me frybread in the Taos pueblo

**S**HE squints at me as the frybread sizzles in the pan, eyes almost closed, a face that you can read the weather in. “Hmmm, you’ve got villages just like this back in India, haven’t you?” Surprised, I only nod, and chew down on the frybread, which is like a thick *puri*, and not terrific. It goes well enough with a bit of honey, but its traditional accompaniment, mutton stew, isn’t available at the Taos *pueblo*, a village of Tewa-speaking Native Americans, and one of the oldest settlements in the USA.

This is supposed to be big-sky country, but it’s a cold, grey wind that whips through the *pueblo* (village), making the dogs fluff up their coats and telling people to stay inside their soft-edged adobe houses. And she’s right: it feels like a village anywhere in India, with the smells of woodsmoke and livestock, untidy, lived-in and with clear plans to not change for the next thousand years or so. And it hasn’t changed for even longer than that: local historians believe that this UNESCO-listed site was probably first built in the 2nd century AD, and the current structures are at least from the 14th century.

But this is the USA, the land of the drive-through, super-size, shiny new everything. To find this here is astonishing. Even the city we’ve come from, Santa Fe, feels like a different universe from the rest of the country, like this is the land stripped down

to its red-orange bones, ancient and wary and watching you silently. If a coyote starts to howl now, I’m going to need a fresh pair of tighty-whities.

At least this trip to a Native American *pueblo* has been more successful: the first one we went to, we found what looked like a great parking spot, only to be informed that it’s sacred ceremonial ground, and we know exactly what happens when old burial grounds are disturbed...

But let’s start over, with **Santa Fe**, which, I believe, was *not* built on old burial grounds, and feels, well, rather lovely. Alien, yes, with its total lack of skyscrapers and its uniformity of beige adobe structures (it’s the law that all buildings here must ape the look of the original Native *pueblos*), but with wonderful spots of colour – turquoise jewellery, a sculpture of a donkey, the deep, dangerous-looking red of dried chillies, and above all, the orange that the beige turns into when the sun is low. Strolling along the covered walkways with their wooden *viga* beams, in the thin, cold mountain air, this feels like a great place to be – clearly prosperous, sort of busily peaceful, a lovely combination of Spanish colonial and Native American touches, completely different from the America we normally see.

This is an old, *old* town: the oldest state capital in the USA, the area was originally home to plenty of Native tribes: including the Zuni and the Hopi, together called →





1 & 2. New Mexico still has a Wild West feel: gunfights and 'injuns' don't feel very far away

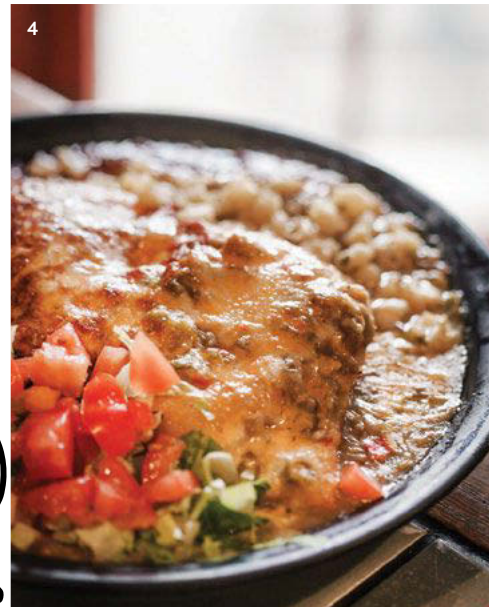
3. The graceful and mysterious staircase at the Loretto Chapel

4. New Mexican food is a hot, slightly gooey combination of beans, meat, cheese and lots of chilli peppers

5. Native Americans selling handmade silver-and-turquoise jewellery outside the Palace of the Governors

6. The deep blue doors are meant to copy those in the *pueblos*

7. A modern, 'friendly' New Age depiction of Kokopelli. Earlier, single women would fear him, because he could leave you pregnant from a dream







1



2

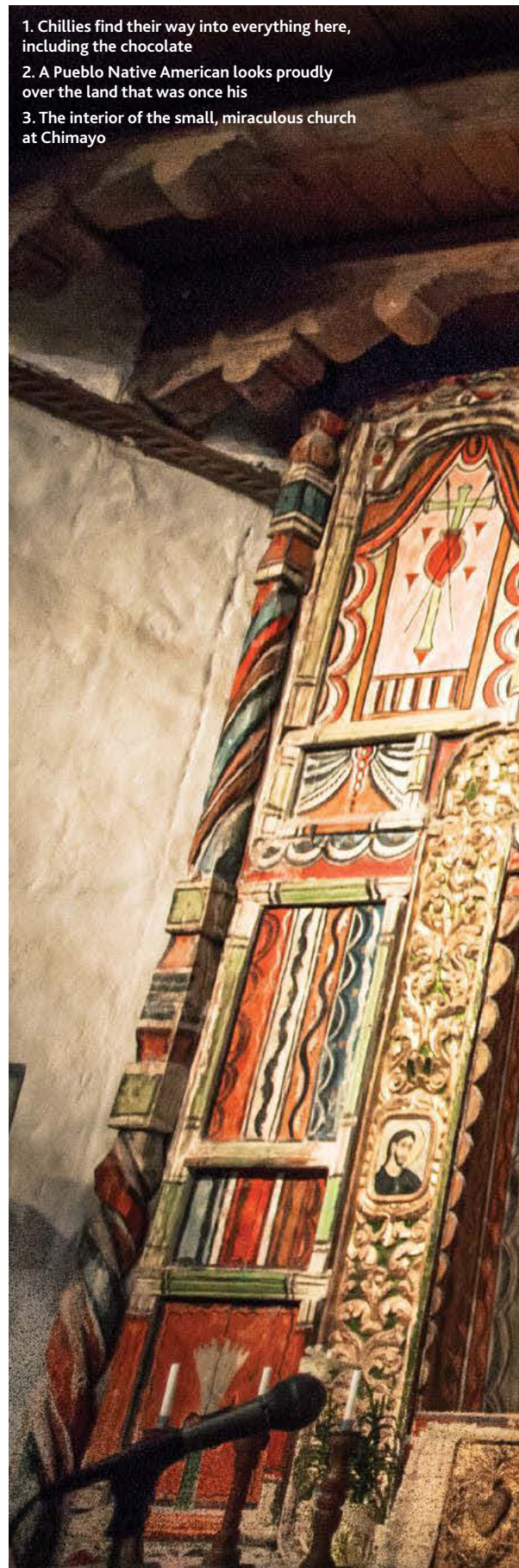
the Pueblo people, until the Spanish started colonising in 1598, making this a part of the huge New Spain colony. Then, it became part of Mexico when that country fought for its independence, seceded, was gobbled up by Texas... The Native Americans revolted, got pushed into reservations, and finally got their revenge by opening casinos. And at some point, some painters discovered that the quality of light here is spectacular; artists came here in droves after that, turning this into one of the cultural hotspots of the USA.

And I don't know whether the artists came here because it was a good-looking town, or whether it's a good-looking town because the artists have kept it that way, but seriously, it's a *damned* good-looking town. The light is indeed wonderful, sharp and crystal-clear in the daytime, a deep red-gold at sunset, and perfect for walking around. We explore it with **Joel Stein**, who takes people on walking tours of historic Santa Fe, and has even written a guidebook to the area, *Santa Fe in a Week (More or Less)*. We start in the historic downtown, appropriately at a spot between the typically grand **Cathedral Basilica of St Francis of Assisi**, and the **Palace of the Governors**, where Native Americans sit in a little flea market on the covered porch, selling silver-and-turquoise jewellery. No, it's certified handmade, Joel insists, not made in China, and at least to me, it looks very much

like Tibetan silverware. Native Americans don't like discussing it, but there's definitely common ancestry, possibly from Taiwan, so it shouldn't be a surprise. There's also the same slightly lost air as with the Tibetans who sell their wares in Goa, far from home – the loss of their land here has been a greater blow than the Pueblo people talk about.

**T**HE cathedral is lovely and inclusive, with a statue of the first Native American woman to be beatified and a carved Tetragrammaton symbol as tribute to the many Jewish merchants who contributed to its construction – but nicer still is the little **Loretto Chapel**, with its miracle staircase. In 1872, when the chapel was being built, the architect suddenly died, and the nuns realised it had no staircase to the loft, and no place to build one. They couldn't use a ladder in their long habits, so they prayed to St Joseph, patron of carpenters, and on the ninth day, a shabby man arrived – possibly a French carpenter, insisted he be left inside, all alone, for three months, with only his simple tools. The staircase was a marvel: two 360° turns, no glue or nails used, only wooden pegs, and a genuine grace. Who was this man? No one knows – this is a true story – and he disappeared without asking for payment. Nice, huh? But then, the whole town is cool. →

1. Chillies find their way into everything here, including the chocolate
2. A Pueblo Native American looks proudly over the land that was once his
3. The interior of the small, miraculous church at Chimayo











**W**E'VE come at a quiet time, but there's a Spanish Market and an Indian (Pueblo) Market, there's an opera, there's the famous 'chile', glutinous and spicy Mexican-derived dishes, with meat, cheese, beans and either green or red peppers, or a combination they call Christmas. Served in elephant-killing quantities, it's interesting but not spectacular, though at the **Blue Corn Café** at least, the craft beer platter more than makes up for it. Much more remarkable is little **Kakawa Chocolate House**, which does proper, original chocolate, the way the so-called Oasisamericans had it: dark, thick, often with chilli. They do little shot-glasses of hot, mysterious chocolate, and all kinds of gooey chocolate confections, laden with roses, lavender, nuts, spices – if you're a chocolate fan, this is a great place to visit.

What's most striking in Santa Fe is the art. **Canyon Road** is the known artists' haven, full of galleries that you could spend a day exploring – but you barely need to go there, because the art is everywhere: murals on pillars, a couple of gorgeous statues of Native Americans, proud and wild, a little statue of a dog at a corner. Glance into a shop and it's stuffed with Native American-styled things: little figures with animal heads that represent nature spirits, a beautiful



1. Pick up beautiful silverware and other art on Canyon Road, an artists' haunt
2. Incredible chocolate 'elixirs' at Kakawa Chocolate House
3. A slightly haunting statue outside the Chimayo Church
4. Welcome to New Mexico. You are now entering the Twilight Zone

turquoise-studded axe, a tree hung with crosses. This is *The City Different*, as the people of Santa Fe call it, and it certainly lives up to that.

Joel himself is quite something. A New Yorker, he used to work at the Twin Towers, retiring not long before 9/11 – he mentions quietly that he lost a lot of friends – and moved here with his wife for some peace. He's hugely knowledgeable about the area, even looking into a bright blue sky and correctly predicting snow in the next couple of days. He tells us Hollywood stars love this place, because no one bothers them here. "Julia Roberts keeps coming here," he says, Gene Hackman has a house in Santa Fe, and Val Kilmer had a ranch nearby. "Yes, yes, everyone says that," I think, until that afternoon, when we're looking to park. We see someone loading up his dusty SUV's boot, looking like he's about to leave.

"Hi. Are you done with that spot?" my photographer, Unni, asks.

Blue eyes look at us in some surprise. "Oh, yeah, I'm done here." He gets in, starts up, leaves. I've seen that face somewhere, I'm thinking, that slight figure.

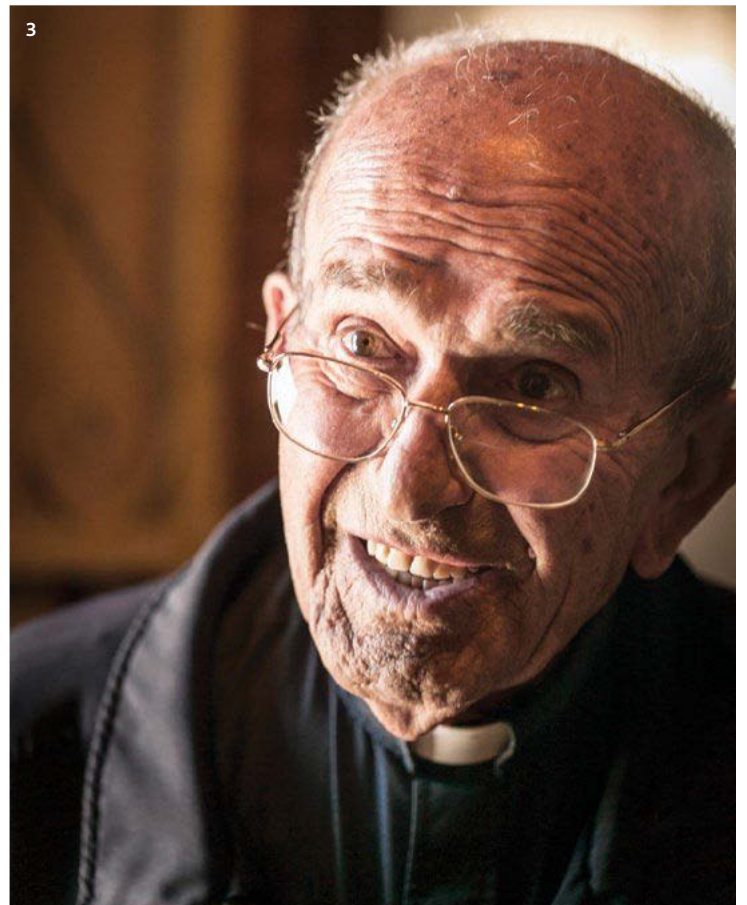
It's Tobey Maguire. *Tobey Maguire!* We took *Spiderman's* parking spot.

I've literally, *literally* never been this cool. Santa Fe, in a word, is *cool*.

But what lurks outside is something else. This is a place where strange things have happened. My knowledge of New Mexico comes largely from Tony Hillerman's →



1. The Taos *pueblo*, with apartment block-style buildings made of adobe
2. Look up some frybread in Taos – but remember to ask for honey or mutton stew
3. Reverend Casimiro Roca at the Chimayo Church, a story all by himself







excellent, eerie detective novels, full of Hopi and Navajo legends. Set in the **Four Corners** region not far from here, there's frequent mention of burial sites, of male witches who shape-shift into wolves, of the healing, trembling paw of Gila Monster, of Coyote the trickster, of the unbelievably creepy *chindi*, a sort of spirit that remains after a person's death, but composed solely of all that was bad inside him. And yes, though this doesn't happen on an everyday basis, there's something otherworldly about this state. Drive an hour to the north-west of Santa Fe and you're in **Los Alamos**, you know, where the nuclear bomb was developed. A little further down the road and you're in **Bandelier National Monument**, an archaeological site with the cave-dwellings of the Anasazi, "the others", or "the ancient enemy", a people who seem to have disappeared without a trace. Drive three and a half hours south and you're at **Alamogordo**, where the first nuclear test took place. Or, three hours south-east, and you're in **Roswell**. You know Roswell,

surely? Given the atmosphere and all that's happened here, I'd be surprised if aliens *haven't* landed here. There are stories among the bleak red rocks here that really, really make you wonder whether you've entered another dimension.

**B**EFORE we set out to find the lost people (the aliens are all in New York, driving cabs, so there's no point looking for them), we go looking for spiritual solace, and, in a surprising break, actually find it.

**Chimayo**, on the way to Taos, is a pilgrimage site, associated with a number of miracles, a pit of healing soil (which, this being the US, you can order online), and a tiny, beautiful *pueblo*-style church, gracefully lit with candles. It's a soft world inside, with fading devotional paintings on wood – called *retablos* – on the wall, a quiet little place that you wouldn't believe is the biggest Catholic pilgrimage site in the USA. And more amazing still is Reverend

Casimiro Roca, 96 years old, a tiny Spanish priest who lost two brothers in the Spanish Civil War, and then came and saved this little chapel from ruin. I can barely understand his accent, but I want to take him home. He's written about the chapel, and himself: *A Long Journey for Two Short Legs*, and, the day he passes away, New Mexico will have lost something enormous. Please go visit while he's around.

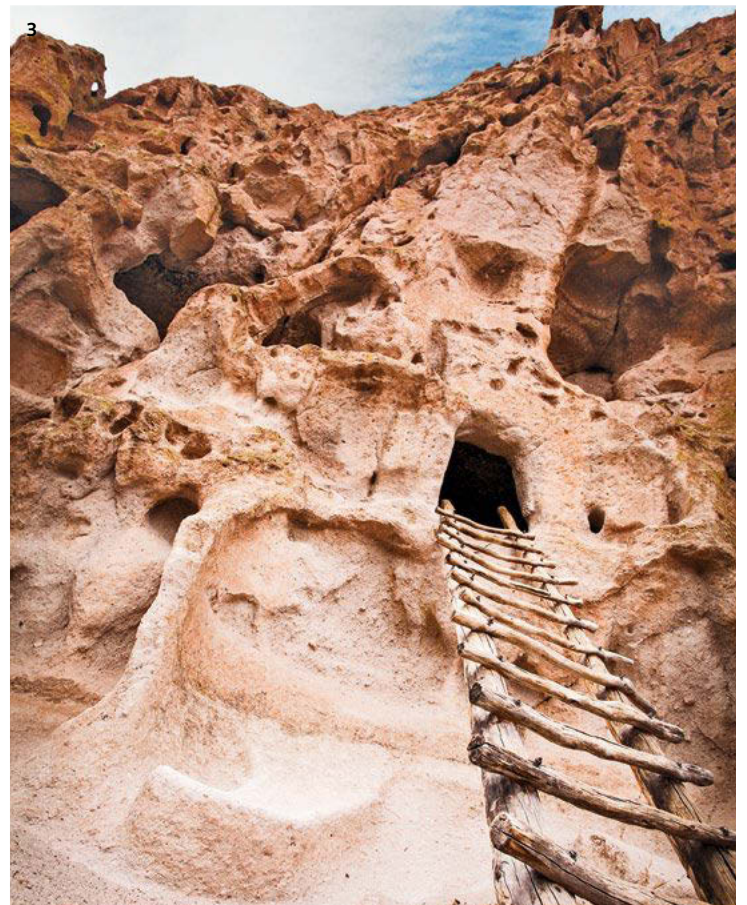
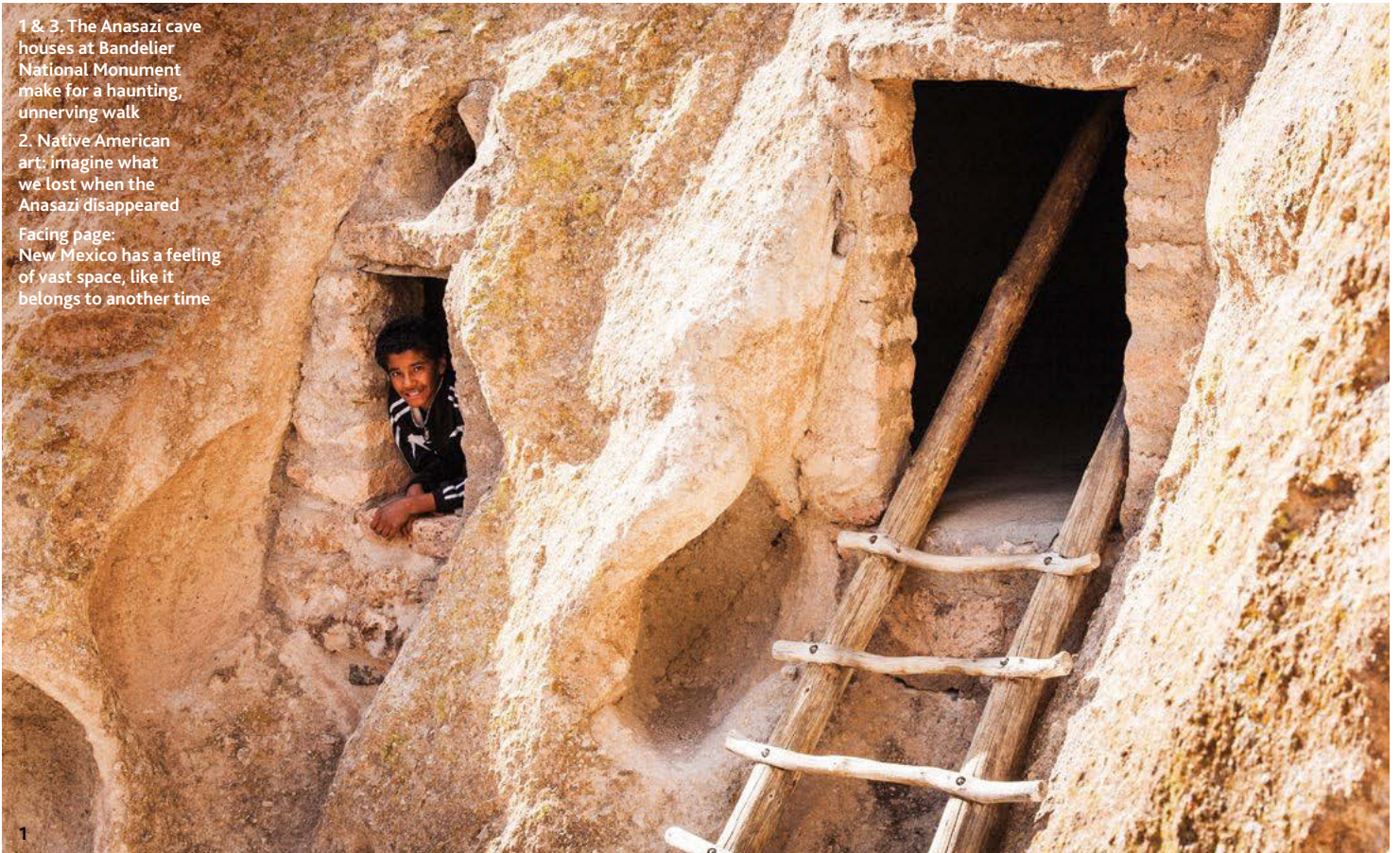
New Mexico, though, is not done with us, and wants us to remember its other-ness. We follow a road at random, and it ends at a little canyon. Going to the lip, to listen for echoes, we see a jumble of wrecked cars at the bottom. They've clearly been pushed over, by the look of them – and then painted. Who did this? *Why?* It's a good reminder to keep the hair on our necks raised as we go to **Taos**, past little towns that look like they're still on the frontier with the Wild West, past the strange adobe towers that form the casinos in *pueblos* by the highway, past the mildly unnerving sign that points to Los Alamos. →



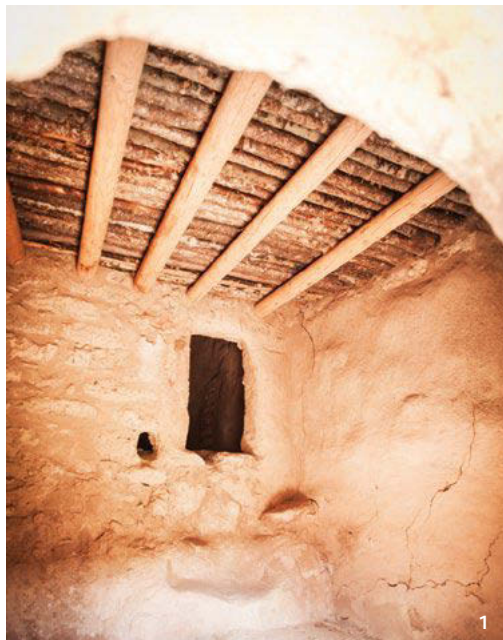
1 & 3. The Anasazi cave houses at Bandelier National Monument make for a haunting, unnerving walk

2. Native American art: imagine what we lost when the Anasazi disappeared

Facing page:  
New Mexico has a feeling of vast space, like it belongs to another time







**T**HEN we enter Bandelier. Do you remember *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit*? The tracks of Redrock Ridge and Lost Canyons? Well, they seem to have been set here, past cliffs lined with cave houses, where the howling isn't just the wind. This is one of many parts in the Four Corners area with Anasazi sites, though a lady at the visitor centre tells me they prefer to call them Ancient Pueblo now, because they were clearly ancestors of the Pueblo tribes, who appeared here around 2,000 years ago and abandoned their carefully-constructed homes by the 15th century. In some places, they built great apartment-like complexes along the cliffs; here they carved right into the rock, leaving behind rooms, entire houses, ceremonial buildings, pots – this was the Indus Valley Civilisation of the USA, and just as mysterious.

Walking around **Frijoles Canyon**, the main walking loop along the sites, you can't help but wish you knew these people. Who were they, the men, women and children who climbed up ladders to access their homes, who would build right into the rock like this? Who made the *kivas*, sacred structures that you only entered and exited through the roof, because it signified the emergence of human beings into the present era, the Fourth World? What ceremonies did they sing around the fire-pits? The Healing Way? The malicious Enemy Way? Did they send *chindi* spirits after



1 & 2. The Anasazi cave houses were clearly well-planned and constructed

3. Juniper bushes send up a beautiful scent through Frijoles Canyon in Bandelier

4. Everywhere you look in Santa Fe, you'll find unsettling, evocative art

people to give them the 'ghost sickness' that could kill off entire families? What were the petroglyphs – stone art – marked into the cliffs, so strange and yet so familiar? And why on earth did they disappear? Where did they go? Some historians suggest simple migration, because the water dried up. Some suggest they were driven out by warfare with other tribes. There are whispers of cannibalism. Some modern Pueblo don't think there's anything mysterious about it, because they simply moved away and mixed with other tribes, others believe the Anasazi had so much control over the forces of nature they created dangerous imbalances, and destroyed their *kivas* and left in a way to make amends.

You can camp here, in Bandelier. Imagine that, being in a tent, coyotes howling somewhere, with the moonlight and the campfire making the petroglyphs look alive. What ghost stories could you tell that are more eerie than of New Mexico itself? Would you keep an eye out for aliens? Would you tremble at a noise from a *kiva*, wondering whether there's still a *chindi* there after so many years, waiting for someone to infect? Would you hear horses in your mind, the thunk of axes and the twang of bows?

Certainly, I wouldn't do it alone. Even in broad daylight, even with the glorious, refreshing smell of juniper all round, even with the warmth of Santa Fe an hour away, I'm shivering a little. ☹





## Essentials

### BEST TIME TO VISIT

Apart from the height of winter, which runs from December to February, New Mexico can be visited at any time of the year. The peak tourist season extends from June to August, when the weather is at its most pleasant, and, while the period between September and November is cooler, it's also less busy. Go between March and May to take advantage of low rates.

### GETTING THERE

Lufthansa, British Airways, United Airlines, American Airlines, Iberia and Finnair fly to Santa Fe Municipal Airport from Mumbai and New Delhi (with two stopovers). Return fares start from ₹ 84,620.

### GETTING AROUND

You can pick up/ hire a car from the Hertz rental booth at Santa Fe Municipal Airport ([hertz.com](http://hertz.com); from ₹ 4,900/ day).

### VISA

Apply for a US B-1/ B-2 tourist/ business visa by filling out the DS-160 form online. Visa appointment times depend on your city; factor in at least a month. It usually takes three working days to process ([ustraveldocs.com](http://ustraveldocs.com); ₹ 10,240 [USD 160]).

### EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Washington, DC: [indianembassy.org](http://indianembassy.org)

### CURRENCY

USD 1 = ₹ 62.75

### FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *South West USA* and *Western USA* guides should have you covered for this trip. Also read Tony Hillerman's Joe Leaphorn series, which is set in the Four Corners region.

### VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Chef Paddy Rawal's Raaga is a fine-dining eatery that has consistently impressed Santa Fe's well-travelled denizens with the quality of its Indian and Indian-inspired food. Expect North Indian classics, some with a curious twist: think Delhi *chaat* with blueberries, and tandoori chicken with an *ancho* (a mild Mexican chilli pepper) and *amchur* crust (00-1-505-820-6440; [raagacuisine.com](http://raagacuisine.com); 544, Agua Fria; 12pm – 9pm Mon – Sat; mains from ₹ 895).



This trip is best clubbed with a longer trip to California, Denver, Texas or the Grand Canyon

## 3 WAYS TO DO SANTA FE

	Budget	Mid-range	Luxury
<b>STAY</b>	The <b>El Rey Inn</b> looks like a motel and is five minutes outside town, but it's comfy, very cosy, and even has a pool and a hot tub (00-1-505-982-1931; <a href="http://elreyinnsantafe.com">elreyinnsantafe.com</a> , <a href="mailto:elreyinn@qwestoffice.net">elreyinn@qwestoffice.net</a> ; 1862, Cerrillos Rd; from ₹ 5,800 with breakfast).	Rated the best hotel in Santa Fe, the Pueblo-style <b>La Fonda</b> is centrally located, with a lovely old-world charm and a real sense of place (00-1-505-982-5511; <a href="http://lafondasantafe.com">lafondasantafe.com</a> , <a href="mailto:reservations@lafondasantafe.com">reservations@lafondasantafe.com</a> ; 100, E San Francisco St; from ₹ 9,800 with breakfast).	The upscale <b>Rosewood Inn of the Anasazi</b> is right opposite the Palace of the Governors, and offers a luxurious, semi-Native, semi-Colonial experience (00-1-505-988-3030; <a href="http://rosewoodhotels.com">rosewoodhotels.com</a> , <a href="mailto:anasazi@rosewoodhotels.com">anasazi@rosewoodhotels.com</a> ; 113, Washington Ave; from ₹ 17,400).
<b>EAT</b>	Not exactly a meal place, but a must-visit, <b>Kakawa Chocolate House</b> does incredible things to chocolate, from spicy drinks to incredible eclairs, in various flavours (00-1-505-982-0388; <a href="http://kakawachocolates.com">kakawachocolates.com</a> ; 1050, E Paseo de Peralta; check website for timings; piece of Aztec brownie: ₹ 250).	The <b>Blue Corn Café and Brewery</b> has great New Mexican food (especially the burritos), and a good selection of beers – a beer sampler platter and a spicy burrito make a great combination (00-1-505-984-1800; <a href="http://bluecorncafe.net">bluecorncafe.net</a> ; 133, Water St; 11am – 10pm; Blue Corn's big burrito: ₹ 650, beer sample platter: ₹ 540, pint from ₹ 300).	<b>Coyote Café</b> comes recommended for its interpretations of New Mexico cuisine, and is one of Santa Fe's most celebrated restaurants. The menu features inventive creations, and there's a wide range of cocktails to choose from, too (00-1-505-983-1615; <a href="http://coyotecafe.com">coyotecafe.com</a> ; 132, West Water; from 5.30pm; mains from ₹ 1,400).
<b>DO/SEE</b>	Do a walking tour (either a set one or a custom tour) of Santa Fe with <b>Historic Walks of Santa Fe</b> , a great introduction to the area. They also arrange tours of the entire area, including Taos, Bandelier and Chimayo. Try to get Joel Stein as your guide (00-1-505-986-8388; <a href="http://historicwalksofsantafe.com">historicwalksofsantafe.com</a> , <a href="mailto:historicwalksofsf@earthlink.net">historicwalksofsf@earthlink.net</a> ).	The <b>Museum of Indian Arts &amp; Culture</b> is must-visit, with a huge collection of Oasiamerican and more modern Native American artefacts, from beautiful pottery to headdresses and jewellery (00-1-505-476-1250; <a href="http://indianartsandculture.org">indianartsandculture.org</a> ; 710, Camino Lejo, off Old Santa Fe Trail; 10am – 5pm Tues – Sun, check website for seasonal timings; ₹ 550 adult, child under the age of 16 free).	A street full of art galleries, garage sales and little shops selling Native American knick-knacks and even balms for pimples, a stroll down <b>Canyon Road</b> can take a good half-day, with some excellent art and conversation pieces on offer, for everyone from connoisseurs to people looking for a 'Red Indian' in their kitchen.





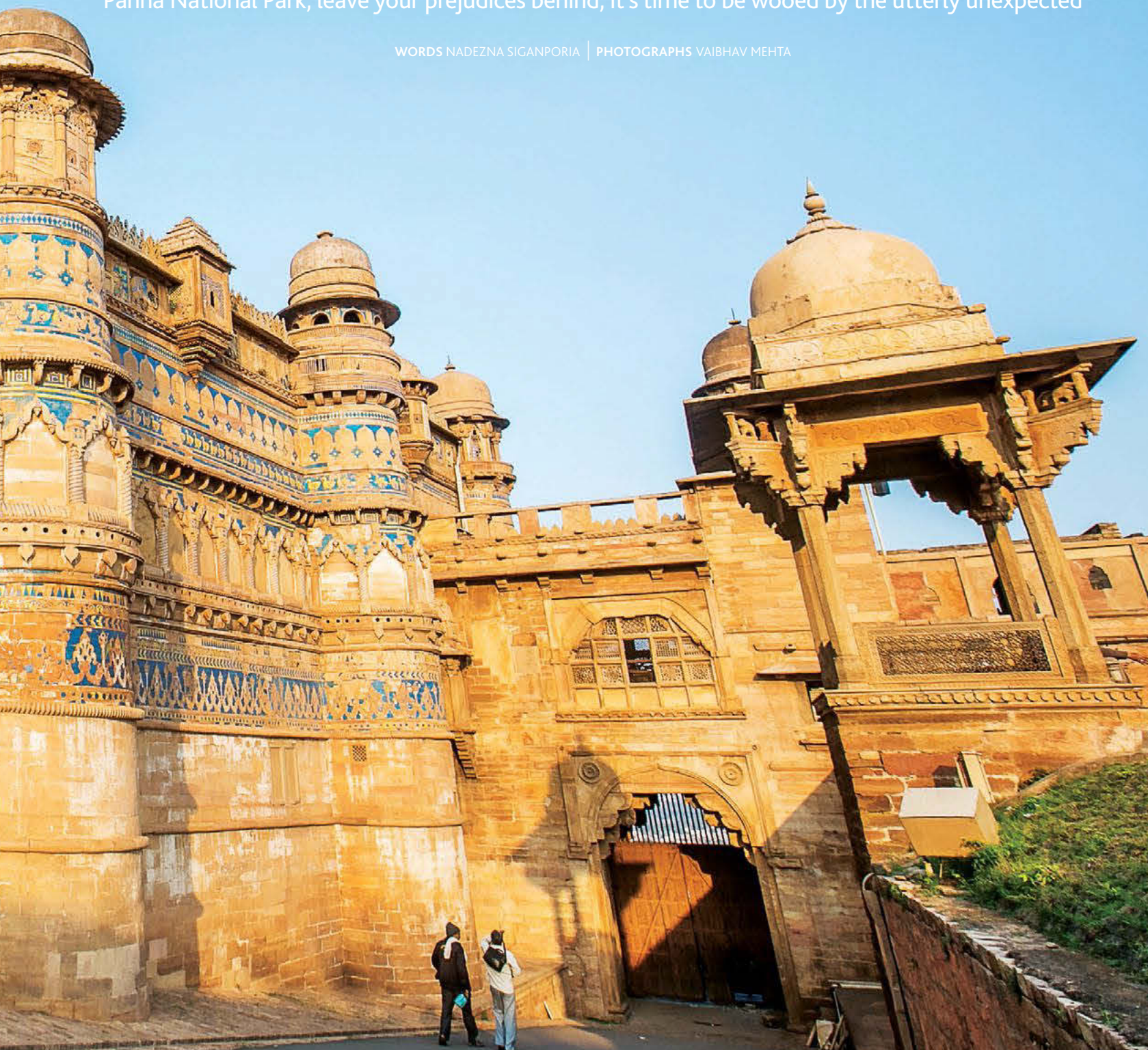
The impressive Man Mandir Palace in Gwalior Fort stands as an incredible testament to the spirit of this city



# THE PERFECT TRIP Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh has the ability to completely take you by surprise, from the mouth-watering street food in Bhopal to the incredible cenotaphs of Orchha, from the fantastic mustard-field-lined highways to the heart-warming hospitality of her people, from watching in awe as gifted locals deftly weave beautiful Chanderi silks to the sheer joy of being surrounded by animal calls at Panna National Park; leave your prejudices behind, it's time to be wooed by the utterly unexpected

WORDS NADEZNA SIGANPORIA | PHOTOGRAPHS VAIBHAV MEHTA





# Your trip mapped out

Everything about Madhya Pradesh and her affectionate people will leave you amazed; each experience is so distinct and so varied that you'll be fascinated with the contrast

## At a glance



### YOUR DESTINATION

**Capital:** Bhopal

**How far away is it?** Bhopal is a 90-minute flight from Mumbai or New Delhi. It takes about three-and-a-half hours from

Gwalior to New Delhi by train.

**Languages spoken:** Hindi, English

### YOUR TRIP

**Ideal number of days:** 12 days

**When to go:** October – March

**Who is it good for?** The interesting mix of experiences lends well to any kind of trip as long as you don't mind being on the road for so long, though the highways are incredible and travel is relatively stress-free.

**Highlights:** Bun kebab at Chatori Galli in Bhopal; jeep safari in Panna National Park; exploring Bir Singh Palace in Datia; gazing at the gorgeous chandeliers in the Durbar Hall of the Jai Vilas Palace in Gwalior

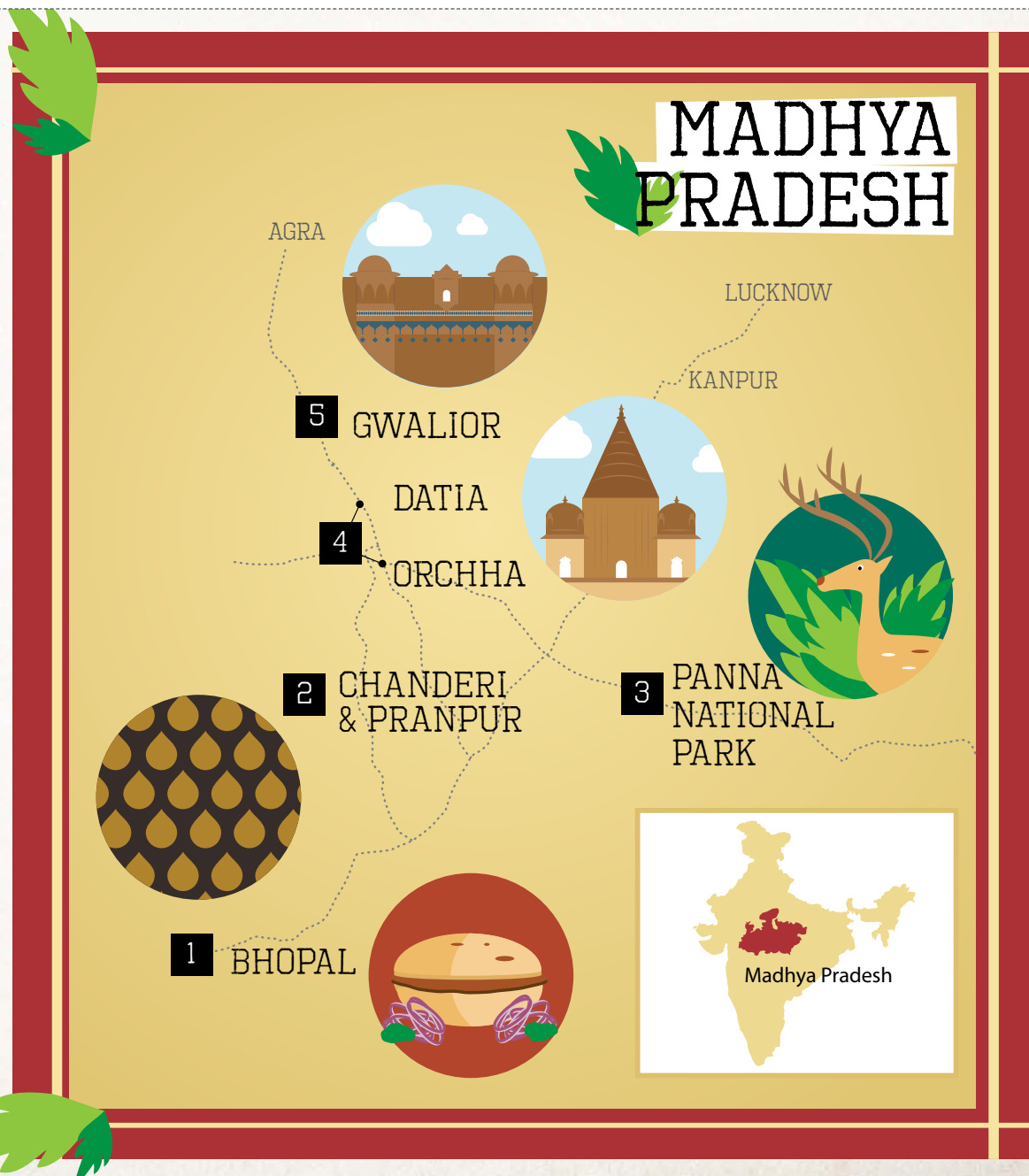
**1 BHOPAL:** Start your trip off with mouth-watering street food and Bhopali delights in the manic alleyways of Old Bhopal.

**2 CHANDERI & PRANPUR:** As you walk through Pranpur, you'll develop immense appreciation for the effort, craftsmanship, time and talent that goes into weaving just one of those gorgeous Chanderi fabrics.

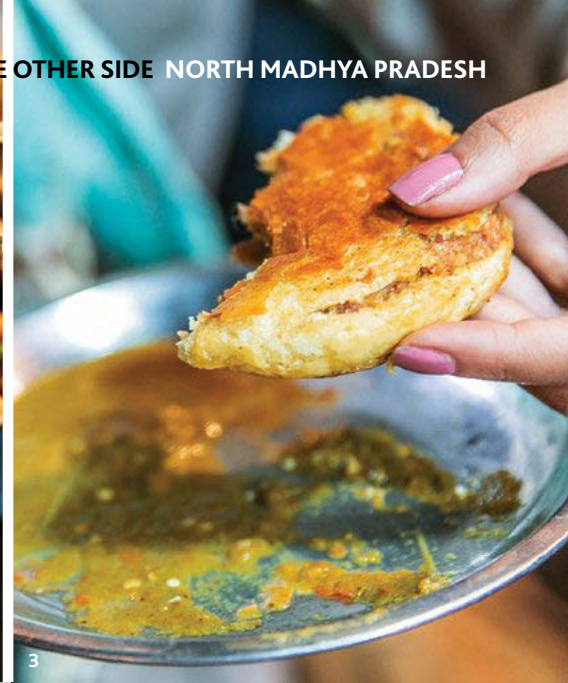
**3 PANNA NATIONAL PARK:** Head to Panna to experience the call of the wild in the midst of feral natural beauty with the Ken River flowing peacefully alongside.

**4 DATIA & ORCHHA:** Both Datia and Orchha have beautiful Bundeli architecture to gawk at; the *chhatris* at Orchha and the Bir Singh Palace in Datia are absolutely breathtaking.

**5 GWALIOR:** Fleeting mentioned in history books, Gwalior's past is so much more captivating up close.







## 1 BHOPAL

### Best for street food

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 1 – 3

It's one of those life-altering moments, the unexpected pleasure of tasting your first bun kebab. To call it Bhopal's version of a burger isn't really doing it justice; this is poetry on a plate. Succulent, flavourful *bade ka kebab* stuffed in a crisp, hot oil-soaked bun and floating in a river of spicy green chutney. We're at the entrance of **Chatori Galli**, a narrow alley in Old Bhopal where, after 7pm, half of Bhopal's population descends in a stream of happy chaos and joyful chatter. This is *the* place to go to sample some of the city's unique street food.

An hour earlier, Vaibhav, the photog, and I were trying to navigate through the other half of Bhopal's population, on the beautifully lit-up shores of the **Upper Lake**. Given that it's the last day of the Jheel Mahotsav and a Sunday evening, we're not surprised by the sheer number of people here. On any other day, this narrow lane by the clear lake is quite perfect for a peaceful stroll at sunset.

Bhopal, being the 'city of lakes', is very proud to be able to offer these experiences. It's also equally proud of its architectural wonders, like the majestic **Taj-ul-Masjid**, said to be the largest mosque in the country. The Islamic influence in Old Bhopal dates back to the early 18th century and to Sardar Dost Mohammed Khan, who is credited with having laid the foundations of the present-day city. For two centuries after, it was his descendants who ruled the Nawabi state.

Back in the present, dodging motorcyclists with their horns blaring and the crazed cacophony that seems to bother absolutely no one else, we head further down the lane to **Hotel Gazala** for *nalli nihari* served with

deliciously fluffy and fresh tandoori *rotis*. The slow-cooked mutton and marrow bones in a thick peppery curry hits the spot, but top it off with a *bater* (quail) that floats in a spicy stew, and you've got yourself an incredible meal. Head there early if you want the sample the famous *bakarkhani roti*, a spiced, layered *roti* that flies off the shelves in minutes.

Not quite done with our culinary quest, we brave the streets again in search of the kind of biryani that only Bhopal can offer. Bhopali biryani isn't like its Lucknowi or Hyderabad counterparts – it's lighter on the spices, utterly flavourful and done best at **Hotel Jameel**. One bite of the fragrant rice with melt-in-your-mouth bits of chicken, and I'm acutely aware that this has ruined every other biryani for me.

Chances are, you're probably going to be stuffed by now, but the lure of Bhopal's juicy kebabs will make you head out for yet another go. Stalls laden with marinated morsels of tender meat call out to you, the aromas beckoning you to have one last try. It's only at **Hotel Afghan** in Peer Darwaza, where we find ourselves wolfing down plates piled high with juicy *shami* kebab and mutton *tikka* kebabs, that we finally decide to call it a day.

Bhopal is as exceptional today as she was in the past. For over a century, the Nawabi princely state was ruled by four Begums; strong and brave women who challenged the rules and changed the course of history, something virtually unheard of in the early 1800s. The city has always tried to defy the norm, pushing its boundaries and refusing to be anything other than extraordinary. Even breakfast here has its own flair; they took something great and made it even better. Fluffy *poha* sprinkled with spicy *sev* topped with crisp *jalebis* – an odd mix that actually works – and a glass of Sulaimani *chai*, a strong tea brewed with sugar syrup and a pinch of salt; this, fittingly, is how Bhopal starts her day. →

1. Curious conversations and innocent gazes at the *madrasa* in Taj-ul-Masjid – everyone has a story to tell here

2. Stalls laden with skewers of deliciously tender meat line the alleyways of Old Bhopal

3. The bun kebab at Chatori Galli will have your tummy humming a happy tune

## Essentials



### 1 WHERE TO EAT

**Bun kebab:** entrance of Chatori Galli; 7pm – 12am; bun kebab: ₹ 7/ piece

**Hotel Gazala:** 00-91-9179338000, 00-91-9229874646; Chatori Galli; 10am – 11pm, *nalli nihari* and *bakarkhani roti* from 6pm – 11pm; *nalli nihari*: ₹ 50, *bater*: ₹ 120, tandoori *roti*: ₹ 4, *bakarkhani roti*: ₹ 15

**Hotel Jameel:** 00-91-9229668827, 00-91-9893615785; Nadeem Rd, Ibrahimpura, opp Chatori Galli; 9am – 11pm; chicken biryani: ₹ 100/ half plate, mutton biryani: ₹ 90/ half plate

**Hotel Afghan:** 00-91-8602385959; 28 – 29, Peer Darwaza; 11am – 11pm; mutton *shami* kebab: ₹ 50/ six pieces, mutton *tikka* kebab: ₹ 90/ plate

**Swad Bhandar:** near Jama Masjid, Itwara Chowk; 7am – 11.30pm; *poha* and *sev*: ₹ 10/ plate, with *jalebis*: ₹ 15/ plate

**Kamaal Tea Stall:** Next to Itwara Mosque, Itwara Chowk; 6am – 11.30pm; Sulaimani *chai*: ₹ 5

### 1 FURTHER INFORMATION

**MP Tourism Head Office:** 00-91-755-2774340, 00-91-755-2778383; mptourism.com, info@mptourism.com; Paryatan Bhawan, Bhadbhada Rd; 10am – 5pm Mon – Sat





1

## 2 PRANPUR & CHANDERI

*Best for traditional crafts*

### DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 4–5

CHANDERI IS ABOUT 220KM NORTH OF BHOPAL. THE DRIVE (VIA VIDISHA) TAKES APPROXIMATELY FOUR-AND-A-HALF HOURS. PRANPUR IS ABOUT 5KM EAST OF CHANDERI.

They march to their own beat in Pranpur; it's the beat of the *khatka*, the clacking of the looms in the pretty, ancient homes that line the labyrinth of alleys that make up this small village just five kilometres from Chanderi. The steady clatter from the scores of looms starts to turn into a thumping cadence in my head; I've tuned into some of the 'notes' and tuned the others out. It's my very own beat, and I like it.

"There's a reason they are all white," Rajpal's voice cuts in. I've been so engrossed in the sights and sounds around us that I've admittedly lost track of the conversation. "The houses, they are all white," our guide for the day and the manager of **Amraee Guest House** repeats. "It's so that the sunlight will reflect off the opposite wall into the windows at which the weavers sit absorbed in their work."

I peek in and there they are, men and women of all ages skillfully looping and tugging gold and silver threads into gorgeous patterns on a kaleidoscope of coloured yarn. It's absolutely fascinating to watch them work: interlacing the *bana* (horizontal threads) with the *tana* (vertical threads) while simultaneously

weaving beautiful designs through the entire length of the material.

Weaving is omnipresent here, and almost everyone in the village is involved in some part of the process; the dyeing and rolling of the raw silk *lachhis* (yarn) onto the *tur* (a cylindrical wooden part of the loom) to make the *tana*, the painstaking and complicated process of *raach bharna*, which means preparing the two reeds needed for each loom, and, finally, the actual weaving of the silk. A few minutes here, and you can't help but appreciate the sheer talent, time and effort that go into making one sari. It can take up to two weeks to make one, depending on how complicated the work is, and the few thousands you pay for the end-product seem absolutely worth it.





2



3



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A few kilometres from the sleepy village of Pranpur is the bustling town of Chanderi, which lends its name to the saris produced in the area. Its distinguished history and illustrious past are still evident today in the 350-odd monuments and fortifications juxtaposed with frenzied streets of the **Andar Shehar**. The handloom unit in Chanderi is located within the Andar Shehar, and you can head to the Raja Rani Mahal, where **Chanderiyaan** has been set up expressly

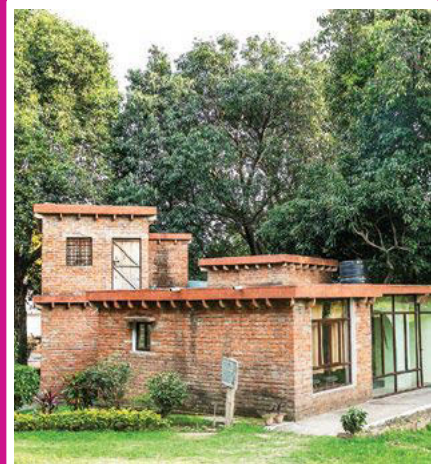
to empower the local weavers and share their talent with the world ([chanderiyaan.net](http://chanderiyaan.net); *Raj Mahal, Chanderi, Ashok Nagar*; saris from ₹ 2,400). Both Chanderiyaan and **Sadar Bazar** (entrance from Delhi Darwaaza) are perfect places at which to pick up a few saris straight off the loom. And when you're done shopping, visit beauties like the **Kirti Durg**, which is a great spot from which to watch the sun set over the town, or the **Jama Masjid**, best experienced early in the morning to see the beams of soft light dance off the incredible stone carvings. →



5

1. Witnessing the making of these beautiful gossamer silks will give you a new appreciation for the sheer talent and effort that goes into them
2. The view from Kirti Durg, especially at sunset, of Chanderi nestled within the surrounding hills and lakes, is quite spectacular
- 3 & 4. Weaving is such an intrinsic part of life here, from the rolling of the yarn on a traditional *charkha* to the weaving of these pieces of art
5. Try the flavourful Bundelkhandi *thali* at Amraee Guest House

## Essentials



### WHERE TO STAY

The rustic and comfortable **Amraee Guest House** (above) in Pranpur has four rooms offering basic amenities and delicious local vegetarian cuisine (reservations: 00-91-9940559513; property: 00-91-9406572756; [travelanotherindia.com](http://travelanotherindia.com); Paryatan Vikas Samiti, Pranpur; from ₹ 2,200 with all meals; guide for Pranpur from ₹ 300, for Chanderi from ₹ 500; alcohol not permitted on the premises).

### WHERE TO EAT

**Amraee Guest House** serves a simple vegetarian *thali* and a Bundelkhandi *thali*, which includes tasty offerings like a spicy spinach *bhaji*, a delicious *dal baati* and a creamy *karhi-chawal* (see *Where to Stay*).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Places like **Kirti Durg**, **Koshak Mahal**, **Badal Mahal gate** and **Jama Masjid** in Chanderi are open from sunrise to sunset and are free to visit.



1. The pretty Ken River meanders along the fringes and through Panna National Park

2. You'll definitely want to go on at least two jeep safaris through the park

3 & 5. You might spot colonies of various vulture species across the beautiful gorge

4. Families of spotted deer intently gaze at you with as much curiosity as you have for them

6. Quirky curios dot the common areas at the Sarai at Toria



### 3 PANNA NATIONAL PARK

*Best for the wild*

#### DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 6–8

THE CHANDERI – PICHORE – JHANSI – CHHATARPUR – TORIA ROUTE (ABOUT 312KM) IS LONGER THAN THE DIRECT ROUTE, BUT THE ROADS ARE BETTER. THE DRIVE TAKES ABOUT SEVEN-AND-A-HALF-HOURS.

We're desperately looking for a jungle fowl; it's seven in the morning and we're only an hour into our jeep safari at Panna National Park. The day started off with cups of wonderfully steaming hot coffee at the Sarai at Toria, and with Vaibhav insisting that he absolutely *has* to see a jungle fowl. He's been to scores of national parks and has always spotted one – it has now become something of a ritual. So, here we are, in the

middle of a gorgeous jungle, with the River Ken running past us, trying our level best to get a glimpse of what seems to be a very elusive creature. Never mind that we're supposed to be here in hopes of spotting a big cat – there's a decent tiger and leopard population in the area; it's the jungle fowl we want.

Kailash, our patient and extremely passionate guide, has helped us spot blue bulls (nilgai) grazing alongside families of spotted deer and sambar, pointed out peregrine falcons and colonies of vultures resting in the gorge, and excitedly shown us a beautiful peacock engaged in its dance. These are some pretty close sightings,

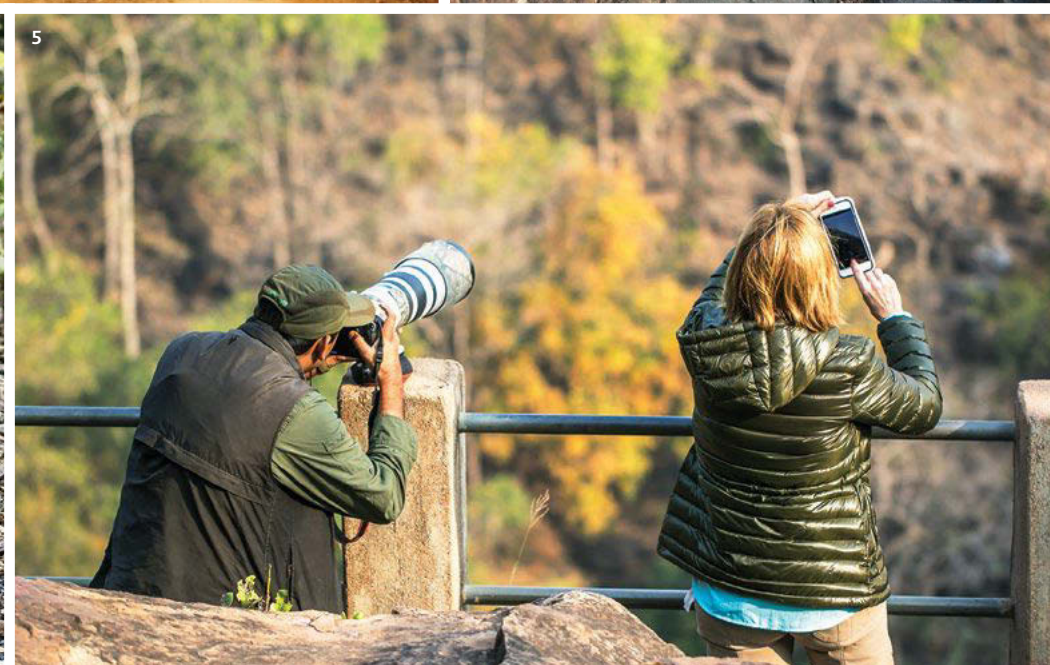
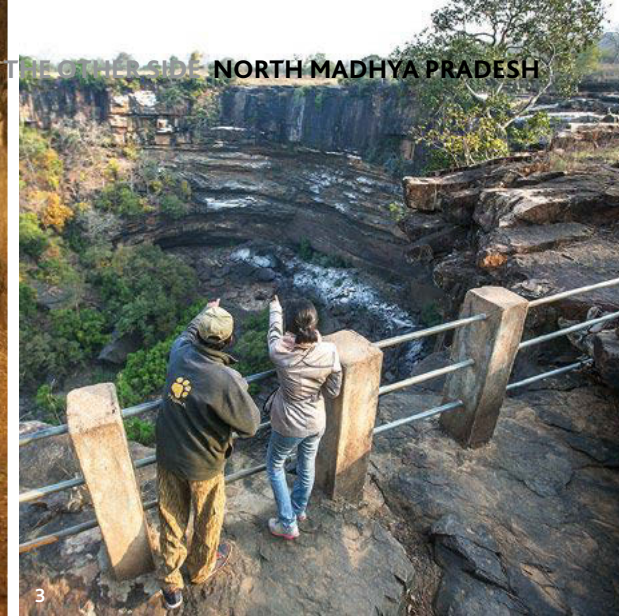
and it's fascinating to share that intense gaze with an animal, an intimate moment in the untamed. As we lounged around a bonfire the previous evening, the other guests at the Sarai had regaled us with their stories and photographs of a leopard spotting. I'm really hoping he's still in the area, and, after a flurry of chatter, we rush to where we can hear the alarm calls of langoores, peacocks and blue bull. It's rare to spot a big cat, and the anticipation is building up.

We wait in silence surrounded by the clear calls of the wild creeping up to us through the thick foliage, slowly reaching a pretty crescendo; it's a harmony I'm never going to forget.

Over the years, Panna National Park lost most its tigers to poaching, and, by 2009, there were none left within the reserve. The next few years







saw phases of relocation, starting with the relocation of two females, one each from the Bandhavgarh and Kanha National Parks along with a male tiger from Pench Tiger Reserve, to repopulate the park. We're told the move was a success, and today, about 26 tigers call these 542sqkm of jungle home.

Coming from the manic streets of Bhopal and the joyful beats of Prampur, it's amazing just how seamlessly you're sucked into the quiet of the jungle, with only animal calls and the rustling of leaves to keep you company. It's a different world out here, one where you happily realise just how superfluous your presence is; you're a spectator – hopefully not a bothersome one – in a cosmos you will never fully comprehend. In the end, we didn't spot a big cat (you need a few trips into the park to be lucky enough to see one), and we didn't even come across that darned jungle fowl – as we're later told, there aren't any in the area. →

## Essentials



### WHERE TO STAY

Located on the banks of the Ken River, the **Sarai at Toria** (above) is a delightfully secluded retreat with eight beautiful, spacious cottage rooms and an open common area for wonderful conversations to be had around a bonfire (reservations: 00-91-124-2356004; property: Joanna: 00-91-9752270337; saraiaattoria.com, saraiaattoria@gmail.com; Mela Wali Gali, Village Toria, Chhatarpur District; from ₹ 16,200 with all meals, in-house activities and taxes, jeep safari from ₹ 6,400/ jeep for one or two people).

Or try:

**MPTDC Jungle Camp:** 00-91-7732-275275; mptourism.com; NH 75, near the Panna National Park entry gate, Madla; from ₹ 2,790 with breakfast  
**Ken River Lodge:** reservation: 00-91-124-2970497; kenriverlodge.com; Madla, near Panna National Park; from ₹ 8,000 with of meals and taxes

### WHERE TO EAT

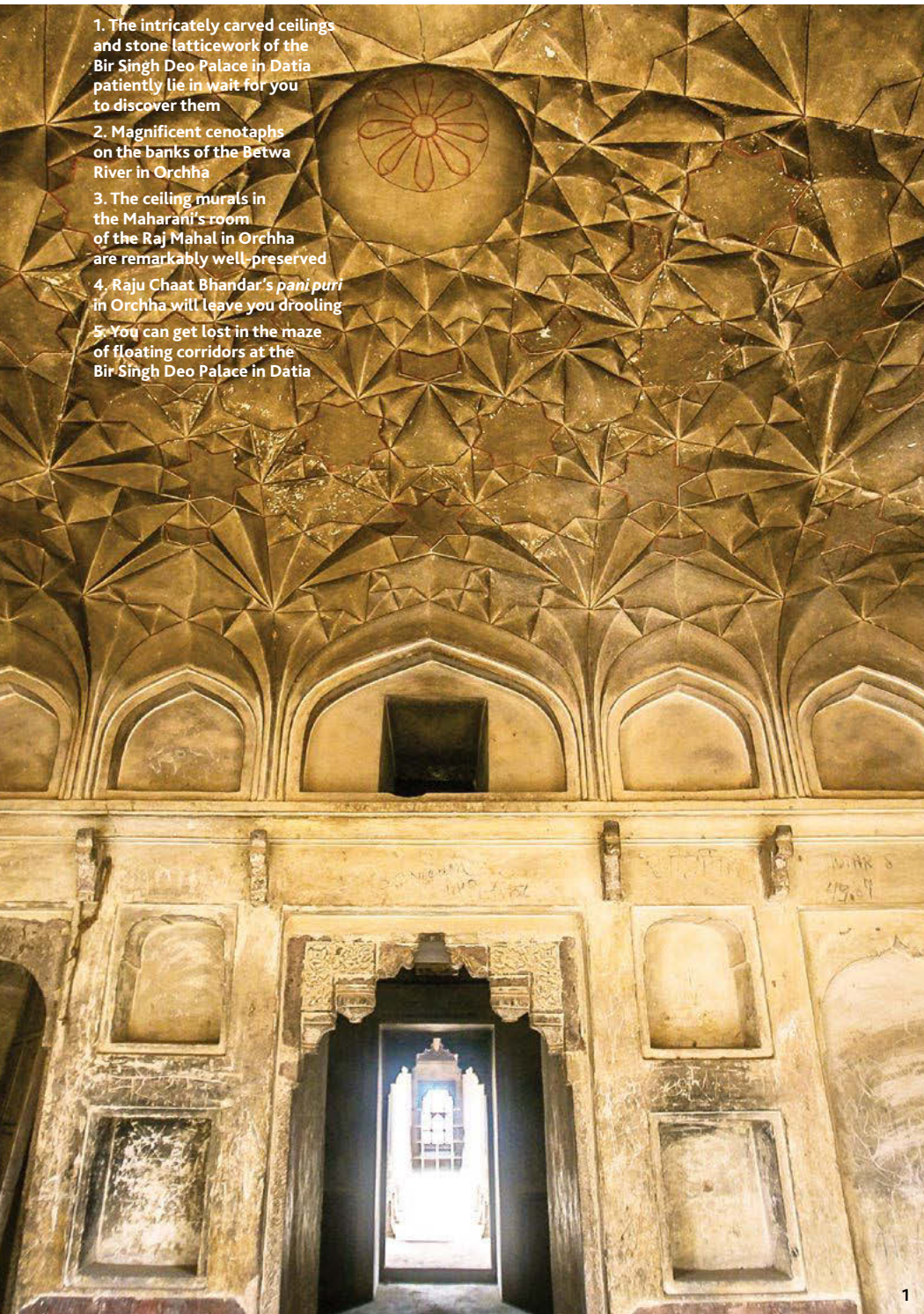
All three properties serve delicious meals. The MPTDC Jungle Camp has a multi-cuisine menu.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

**Panna National Park:** 00-91-7732-252135; park: 6.30am – 10.30am, 2.30pm – 5pm, park closed from Jul 1 to Oct 15; best time to visit Dec – Mar; entry: ₹ 1,250/ person, jeep: ₹ 200, guide: ₹ 300



1. The intricately carved ceilings and stone latticework of the Bir Singh Deo Palace in Datia patiently lie in wait for you to discover them
2. Magnificent cenotaphs on the banks of the Betwa River in Orchha
3. The ceiling murals in the Maharani's room of the Raj Mahal in Orchha are remarkably well-preserved
4. Raju Chaat Bhandar's *pani puri* in Orchha will leave you drooling
5. You can get lost in the maze of floating corridors at the Bir Singh Deo Palace in Datia



#### 4 DATIA & ORCHHA

### *Best for Bundeli architecture*

#### DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 9 – 10

THE DRIVE TO ORCHHA FROM TORIA (ABOUT 179KM) TAKES APPROXIMATELY FOUR-AND-A-HALF HOURS. DATIA (ABOUT 50KM) IS ABOUT A 90-MINUTE DRIVE FROM ORCHHA.

She stands proud, this magnificent work of art, even though it seems like her splendour has been all but forgotten. I am pretty much all alone as I marvel at the stunning architecture and mind-boggling symmetry, Vaibhav is off in some other corner of this massive palace, no doubt as fascinated by its beauty as I am. We're at Datia's **Bir Singh Deo Palace**, or Vir Mahal, or Datia Palace, or Purana Mahal

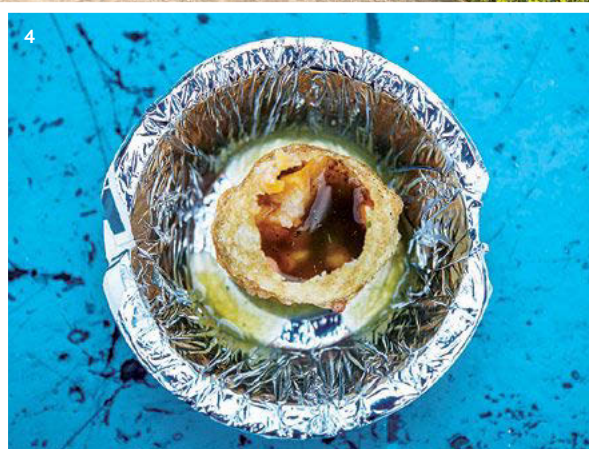
– it has a lot of names, so you can call it what you want, but what I *can* tell you is that it is one of the most breathtaking examples of Bundeli architecture. Beams of early-morning sun dance off the *chhatris* (cenotaphs) and peep through the beautiful latticework screens, and there's not a soul around to disturb us. It's quiet – not an eerie silence, but a peaceful one.

It's ironic how the legends of its creator are a far cry from the serenity that today envelops the palace. The Bundelas were said to be some of the fiercest of the Rajput warrior races, and there are quite a few ghastly tales surrounding their reign. Raja Bir Singh Deo was one of the most celebrated of the Bundela kings, and was exceedingly instrumental in pushing Orchha, the erstwhile capital of the kingdom of Bundelkhand, and Datia to flourish. An extremely shrewd ruler, he cleverly aligned himself with Jehangir, ensuring the stability of his kingdom. It is said that Bir Singh, having defeated Abul Fazl, Akbar's trusted confidant, had his severed head delivered to Jehangir as a gift to secure their friendship. One of the most appalling tales of his ruthlessness I hear is of him sentencing his own son to be torn apart by hunting dogs for having killed a prophet in the same horrific manner.

Gory stories aside, it was during his reign that the Bundeli architectural style really came into its own. Borrowing heavily from both Rajput and Mughal designs, this style is a stunning *mélange* of various other architectural nuances – rustic elements from village huts, elongated spires typical of Jain designs, and the Persian *dastagirs* (wind towers). This palace is one of the very best examples of this curious architectural style, and, fortunately, we have all the time in the world to explore it, and five dramatic levels to indulge our need for those solitary moments of harmony with the structure. The seven-storeyed palace, which looks over Datia and the Kama Sagar from an elevated rock formation, has two underground levels carved out of rock; unfortunately, those are closed to the public. The entire structure is made of stone and brick without any wood or metal support, a feat of engineering given its size.

As you walk the under the arches of the floating bridges that gracefully bind the symmetrical courtyards and cloisters, a story starts to form in your head about the whispered conversations in quiet corners, the romantic tête-à-têtes in moonlit balconies, and the moments of quiet contemplation beside oriels. It's all just a wonderful fantasy, though, because it's said that, after building the palace in 1620AD, Bir Singh Deo never occupied it, and what is widely considered





to be the ultimate achievement of Bundela architecture has since remained in near-desolation.

The small and highly-popular town of **Orchha** is the perfect base from which to visit Datia. It has its share of fascinating 16th- and 17th-century Bundeli architecture to explore, though finding those lingering solitary experiences here is unlikely. The murals at the **Laxminarayan Temple** are breathtaking and definitely worth a dekho. Within the royal complex, the **Jehangir Mahal**, **Raj Mahal** and **Rai Praveen Mahal** are beautiful examples of the region's architecture. The gorgeous ribbed cupolas with a lotus-petal shaped base, delicate wall and ceiling paintings, and intricate trellis work are the best features of these magnificent palaces. But the absolute highlight are the majestic *chhatris* – 14 symmetrical memorials spread out in a peaceful, manicured garden overlooking the Betwa River. →

## Essentials

### WHERE TO STAY

**Bundelkhand Riverside** (right) is a heritage hotel with private balconies looking out at Betwa River attached to some rooms (00-91-7680-252612; [bundelkhandriverside.com](http://bundelkhandriverside.com); Orchha; from ₹ 4,500 with breakfast and taxes).

Or try:

**MPTDC Betwa Retreat**: 00-91-7680-252618; [mptourism.com](http://mptourism.com), [betwa@mptourism.com](mailto:betwa@mptourism.com); Orchha; from ₹ 2,590 with breakfast

**The Orchha Resort**: 00-91-7680-252222; [orchharesort.com](http://orchharesort.com); Kanchanaghat, by Betwa River, Orchha; from ₹ 4,650 with breakfast

### WHERE TO EAT

**GRAB A MEAL AT MPTDC SHEESH MAHAL** (00-91-7680-252624; OPP JEHANGIR PALACE, ORCHHA; 8AM – 10AM, 12PM – 3PM, 7PM – 10.30PM; MAINS FROM ₹ 120), OR **MPTDC YATRIKA TOURIST MOTEL IN DATIA** (00-91-7522-238125; 8AM – 10AM, 12PM – 3PM, 7PM – 10.30PM; MAINS FROM ₹ 135).



### FURTHER INFORMATION

There is one ticket for the royal complex, Laxminarayan Temple and the cenotaphs in Orchha (8am – 5.30pm; entry: ₹ 10/ person, camera: ₹ 25). Entry into Bir Singh Palace in Datia is free (8am – 5.30pm).





## 5 GWALIOR

### *Best for a peek into the past*

**DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 11 – 12**

IT TAKES ABOUT TWO-AND-A-HALF HOURS TO GET FROM DATIA TO GWALIOR (125KM).

I've spent the better part of an hour gawking at an exquisite pair of Belgian glass chandeliers; together weighing a staggering 7,000kg, each chandelier has 248 bulbs. It's said that before mounting the mammoth chandeliers, about eight elephants were made to stand and walk around on the roof of the domed ceiling for several days to test its strength. I'm convinced that Gwalior has adopted its unassuming nature solely to shock its visitors. You don't start out with too many expectations, and, as you slowly learn about its glorious and turbulent history, you're left in awe of the city.

The Durbar Hall that houses these beautiful chandeliers is the star of the **Scindia Museum**, located within a corner of the massive **Jai Vilas Palace**. The interiors, heavily influenced by Greco-Roman and Baroque architecture, are mesmerising – Corinthian columns, gilded walls and ceilings that used 560kg of melted gold, and a domed ceiling based on St Peter's Cathedral in Rome. The rest of the private royal museum has equally interesting artefacts and memorabilia on display. My favourites include the silver toy train that pulls cut-glass decanters around the main dining table, the royal chariot, and the grand Persian carpet with portraits of 185 great kings and world leaders.



It's the tales of **Gwalior Fort** that are truly fascinating, though. Having witnessed the reign of seven dynasties, the 35ft-high walls hold within them a trove of palaces, royal guesthouses, temples and Jain sculptures carved out in the rock.

The 15th-century **Man Mandir Palace**, constructed by Raja Man Singh of the Tomar Dynasty, has been the scene of turbulent battles, political executions and cruel imprisonments. From the *jauhar* committed by the queens in the underground levels, to Akbar executing his cousin, and Rani of Jhansi's seizing of the palace after defeating the Maharaja of Gwalior (who was said to have been siding with the British) – the palace has been such a big part of Gwalior's tumultuous past that this beautiful structure now has an air of melancholy.

The exterior of the palace has stunning *meenakari* friezes – murals in vivid turquoise, yellow and green stand out against the pale stone; patterns of ducks, elephants, crocodiles and tigers adorn the façade. One of the finest examples of Rajput architecture, the palace holds within it chambers lined with latticework screens and courtyards filled with column brackets in the shape of mythological creatures, peacocks dragons and crocodiles.

There's another story that stays with me, about Mrignayani, the only one of Man Singh's nine wives who wasn't of royal blood. The 15th-century **Gujari Mahal**, now a museum with rare antiquities from as far back as the 5th century, stands testament to Man Singh's love for his Gujar queen who demanded her very own palace.

The city below echoes the feel of historic significance, especially

at the tombs of the sufi saint Ghaus Mohammed and Tansen. Built by Akbar, the former draws heavily on Iranian influences. Within the sprawling gardens nearby we find Tansen's tomb.

We stand there filled with a sense of reverence for the poignant beauty of the tombs and for the magnitude of Gwalior's past, and we realise that it isn't only this stop that took us by surprise; our entire journey through Madhya Pradesh has astounded us. ☺

## Essentials

### WHERE TO STAY

With 15 beautiful rooms, each with private verandahs that open out onto sprawling gardens, and historic treasures to explore within the property, **Neemrana Deo Bagh** is a great stay option in Gwalior (reservations: 00-91-11-4666 1666; property: 00-91-751-2820357; [neemranahotels.com](http://neemranahotels.com); Jadhav Kothi, opp Janakta, Agra-Mumbai Rd, Bahodapur; from ₹ 4,500 with breakfast).

### WHERE TO EAT

Try the vegetarian *thali* at **Bhojan** in Patankar Bazaar, which includes *dal baati*, *laddoos* and *karhi-chawal* (11am – 10pm; thali: ₹ 140).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

**Gwalior Fort:** 8am – 5.30pm; entry for State Protected monuments: ₹ 10/ person, camera: ₹ 25, ₹ 5/ person for the Man Mandir, Sas Bahu Mandir and Teli Ka Mandir. You can hire a cycle to get around (₹ 50 for a two-hour ride within the fort premises, deposit ₹ 500).

**Scindia Museum at Jai Vilas Palace:**

10am – 5.30pm Tues – Sun; entry: ₹ 70/ person, camera: ₹ 70

**Archaeological Museum at Gujari Mahal:**

10am – 5pm Tues – Sun; entry: ₹ 10/ person, camera: ₹ 50





1 & 4. The silver chariot of the Scindia royal family and the painted porcelain Napoleon Bonaparte table on display at the Jai Vilas Palace

2. Quiet moments spent appreciating the beauty of the Man Mandir Palace in Gwalior Fort

3. The fantastic Durbar Hall with its mammoth chandeliers and gilded walls at the Jai Vilas Palace is testament to the grandeur of the Scindia royals



## Make it Happen: Madhya Pradesh

### Essentials

#### BEST TIME TO VISIT

Temperatures soar in the summer; it's best to visit this part of Madhya Pradesh after the monsoon, from October to March.

#### GETTING THERE

Jet Airways and Air India fly non-stop from Mumbai (from ₹3,500 one-way) and New Delhi (from ₹3,800 one-way) to Bhopal. From Gwalior, take the daily 12001 NDLS Shatabdi Express to New Delhi (leaves Gwalior [GWL] 7.48pm, reaches New Delhi [NDLS] 11.30pm; ₹685 AC Chair Car) or fly on Air India to New Delhi via Agra (from ₹3,500 one-way). Air India flies non-stop to Mumbai from Gwalior (₹7,800 one-way).

#### GETTING AROUND

It is best to hire a car for your road trip. We used the services of **Rai Travels** (00-91-9893054246, 00-91-9425300316; [raitravels.com](http://raitravels.com), [gopal@raitravels.com](mailto:gopal@raitravels.com), [raitrav\\_bpl@sancharnet.in](mailto:raitrav_bpl@sancharnet.in); AC Indica: ₹2,600/ day).

#### GOOD TO KNOW

Ask at Amraee Guest House for **Kalleybhai** to take you around Chanderi.



## 3 WAYS TO DO BHOPAL

### STAY

With primo location atop Shamla Hills, **Ivy Suites** offers fantastic panoramic views over Upper Lake. This boutique hotel, which has about 10 spacious and pretty rooms, is full of character – beautiful paintings adorn every wall and evergreen ivy creeps up the eastern façade (00-91-755-4234753; [ivysuites.in](http://ivysuites.in), [ivysuites@gmail.com](mailto:ivysuites@gmail.com); 26-A, Nadir Colony, Shamla Hills; from ₹3,600 with breakfast).

With a name that means 'Light of Dawn', **Noor-U-Sabah Palace** is bound to impress. Located in a quiet corner on the banks of the Upper Lake, views from the lake-facing rooms, the pool and the open-air seating of the Marble Arch restaurant are spectacular, especially at sunset. There are a few quirky additions like a dental 'spa' and a pink room nicknamed the 'Lonely Lady' room meant for solo women travellers (00-91-755-4223333; [noorussabahpalace.com](http://noorussabahpalace.com), [reservations@nusp.in](mailto:reservations@nusp.in); VIP Rd, Koh-e-Fiza; from ₹7,000 with breakfast).

The heritage **Jehan Numa Palace** is over a hundred years old. With luxurious rooms, a spa, a pool, three restaurants and an open-air café, this peaceful hotel cocooned within gardens is the perfect place to come back to after a busy day (00-91-755-2661100; [jehannuma.com](http://jehannuma.com), [reservation@jnph.in](mailto:reservation@jnph.in); 157, Shamla Hills; from ₹7,500 with breakfast).

### EAT



While the streets of old Bhopal are the best places to find fantastic local eats, there are a few restaurants that serve delectable Bhopali food as well. **Filfora** in Koh-e-Fiza is known for its mouth-watering *murgh qorma* and succulent *shami* kebabs, a meal best finished off with creamy *phirni* and delicious *shahi tukda* (00-91-755-4256926; 18-ABDA Colony, Koh-e-Fiza; 11am–11pm; mains from ₹160, *murgh qorma*: ₹210, *shami kebab*: ₹120/ five pieces, *phirni*: ₹35, *shahi tukda*: ₹35).

**Shahnama**, located in the beautiful Jehan Numa Palace, serves the best *Murgh Bhopali Rizala* – deliciously tender chicken pieces cooked in a coriander and yoghurt gravy (00-91-755-2661100; [jehannuma.com](http://jehannuma.com); 157, Shamla Hills; 7am–10am, 1pm–3pm, 7.30pm–11pm; *Murgh Bhopali Rizala*: ₹690, mains from ₹350).

### SEE/ DO

Any exploration of the city ought to begin at the **Taj-ul-Masjid** (above). With its massive sandstone walls and a courtyard to rival a football field, it is said to be one of the largest mosques in Asia. Come here at dawn for the dawn *azan* or *jumma* to see the mosque at its best.

Go boating on the Upper Lake – the **MP Tourism Boat Club** offers motorboat rides (₹40/ person/ five minutes, minimum three people), pedal boats (₹30/ boat/ 30 minutes) and kayaking (₹30/ kayak/ 30 minutes).

The **Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum** is quite spectacular. The beautiful installations impressively depict the culture, traditions, art, legends and customs of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh, which include the Gond, Bhil, Korku, Baiga, Kol, Bharia and Saharia. From a giant banyan tree symbolising the tribal landscape of the state and beautiful tribal art to incredibly carved marriage *mandaps* and artistic installations depicting the legends, which are so intrinsically woven into daily life, a jaunt through this extremely well-curated museum is a wonderful experience (00-91-755-2661640; [mptribalmuseum.com](http://mptribalmuseum.com); Shamla Hills; 12pm–8pm Tues–Sun; entry: ₹10/ person, camera: ₹50).

### SHOPPING

During your **village walk** in Prampur, pick up some pretty metal *kadas* and curios made the traditional way (from ₹150). In Gwalior, head to **Arihant Emporium** to pick up some interesting curios, marble and silver boxes with inlay and enamel work resembling the tile-work at the Man Singh Palace (from ₹900) or sandstone statues (00-91-751-3296510; *Aashiyana*, *Phool Bhag*, *Lashkar*; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat; jewellery from ₹300, statues from ₹850).

### SIDE TRIPS

While you're in Bhopal, do pencil in some time to visit the nearby historical sites of Sanchi and Bhimbetka. The stupa at **Sanchi** needs no introduction, and can be visited as a day-trip from the city (44km north-east of the city; sunrise–sunset; ₹10).

**Bhimbetka** and its staggeringly ancient rock paintings are worth making the drive out for (45km south-east of the city; sunrise–sunset; ₹10). At this unassuming site in the middle of nowhere, you'll also find features dating back at least a hundred thousand years.



# YOU DON'T COME HERE TO CATCH UP ON YOUR SLEEP.



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MAGAZINE  
INDIA 105  
April 2015



Sri Lanka's untouched  
parts aren't all ruins –  
plenty of great beaches  
here too!

Facing page:  
We spotted a Tiger  
in Sri Lanka



# BURNING *Bright*

Venture beyond the familiar in Sri Lanka. Venture into the country's north-east that we know so well – for all the wrong reasons. You'll find that it's just as welcoming – and easy on the pocket

WORDS ALISHA WADIA | PHOTOGRAPHS HASHIM BADANI







*“Father David” he whispers.  
 “Uh, no, your name?” I repeat,  
 with unwavering confidence.  
 “Father David,” he repeats patiently.  
 No no, not your father, sir,  
 your name?” I press on like  
 an unwavering idiot.*

1. Getting ready to ride the waves – surfboards atop rickshaws are a regular sight around Arugam Bay
2. A Jaffna cigar-maker rolls pungent over-sized *beedis*
3. You'll run into local children giggling shyly on Trinco's beaches
4. It's hard to tell who's been waiting longer for one of Jaffna's temples to open – the priest or the car
5. Whether you're surfing or not, the waters at Arugam will tempt you
6. Jaffna's coastal causeways are blue and silent, much like the city
7. Shrimp farmers tuck their bicycles away for the night before getting to work
8. Our divine Jaffna king crab curry with jasmine rice disappeared quickly
9. The ruins in Jaffa are haunting



This continues for a baffling 30 seconds before my internal lightbulb flickers on, on tiny-as-a-speck Delft Island off the coast of Jaffna, up in north-east Sri Lanka. A priest, as your considerably stronger mental faculties must have gathered, Father David's a wonderful man who's all smiles, and doesn't miss a beat before asking us when we'll visit again. That's how they are here.

It's been close to six years of a welcome, if slightly uneasy peace in this war-torn pocket of Sri Lanka, which has been closed off for the better part of three decades. Six years since the very bloody civil war ended in a sudden surge, in which Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the notorious leader of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam), or Tamil Tigers as they were known, was gunned down by the Sri Lankan army in May 2009. What with the 26-year war and the catastrophic Boxing Day Tsunami, this bit of Sri Lanka has seen its share of strife.

And what a beautiful bit it is. Maybe it's because of the war and because tourists

never got here, but Sri Lanka's east coast is raw and breathtaking. It's a far cry from Galle's colonial hangover, Colombo's trendy cafés and Kandy's historic temples. Curly Sinhalese letters on signs change to blocky Tamil ones along the iconic (and now demined) A9 to Jaffna, once called 'the highway of death'. Imagine miles of unspoiled coast, palm-fringed, sun-baked beaches that curve lazily to the south, locals languorously pedalling about neat little fishing villages in a lush, tropical landscape...

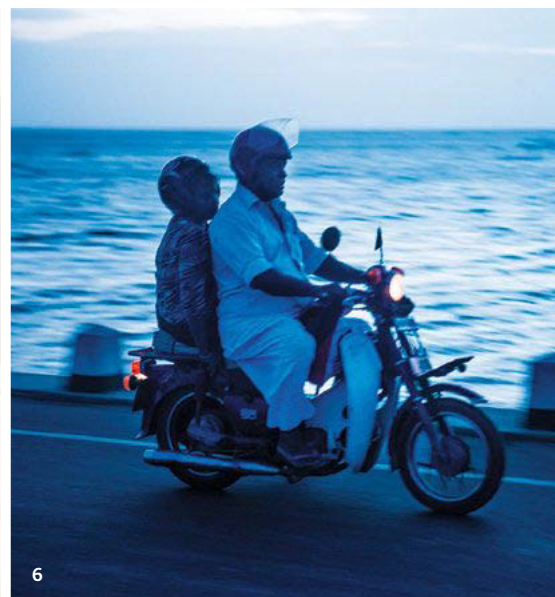
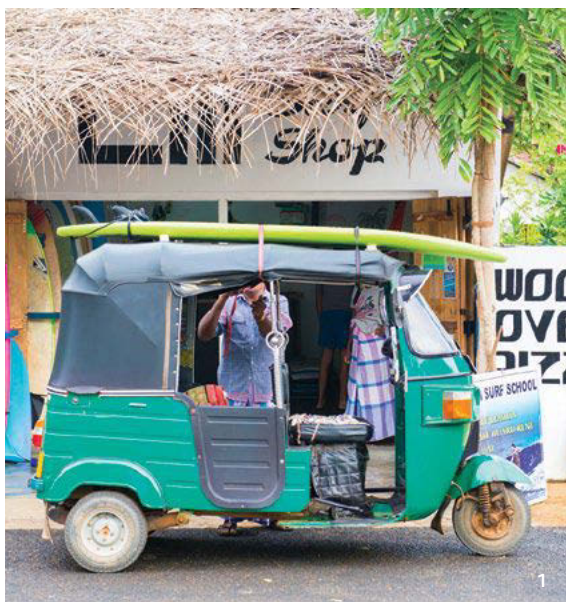
Of course, there's also government propaganda, amid whispers of a Keyser Söze-like Prabhakaran being alive and plotting his return. This is a country where the previous government (described by a rickshaw driver as a one-man show) was accused of war crimes and ethnic cleansing and of being entirely intolerant of the media. Where the army has been accused of raining shells on 'no-fire zones' as part of a mission to save the country from terrorists. The rebels didn't have a better reputation, and the LTTE's

unshakeable belief in a fight for justice led them to recruit women and child soldiers.

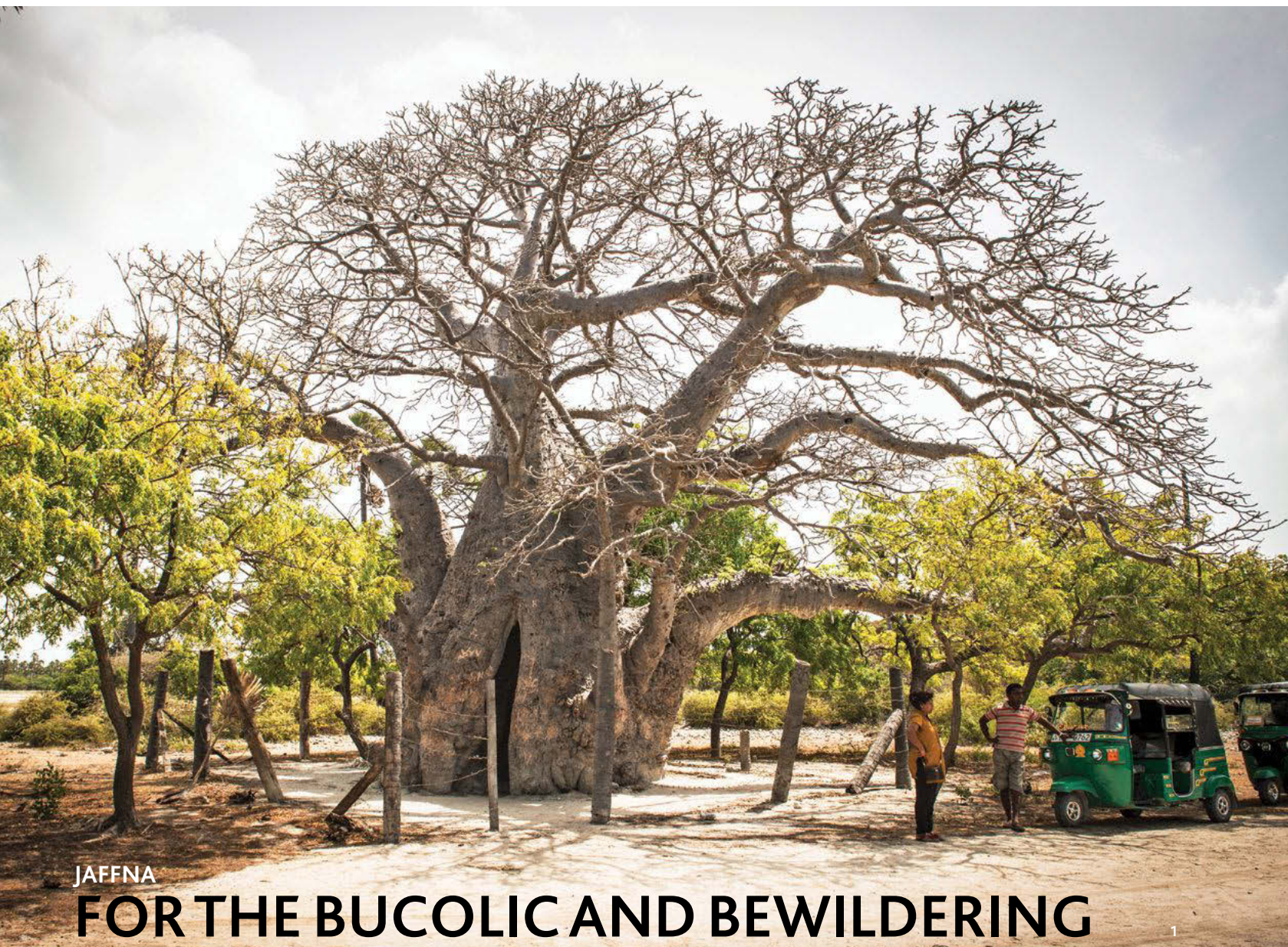
It's evident that Sri Lanka's east coast, and Jaffna in particular, probably won't be your first choice, or even your fifth, when you're thinking of a holiday. Go anyway. Who cares if it's too soon after the war – the violence is done with. Go because it's easy on the pocket, because it's not just an extension of southern India or a decimated war-zone. But mostly, go because it's home to charismatic people who are pretending it's business as usual, who need you very much, and who are just as curious about you as you are about them.

There's a whole new government now, and there's some long-deserved hope and optimism. But more than that, there's a very palpable sense of relief, an eagerness to simply shake off the past and make up for all the lost time. Locals that are inquisitive about you, and all so happy that their world is a stable place as they slowly piece it back together. Because, as we discovered, there's so much more to it than looking for war stories. →









JAFFNA

# FOR THE BUCOLIC AND BEWILDERING

IT'S all quite bizarre. There's a colourful celebration loud enough to be a wedding, but turns out to just be a Hindu temple, unfortunate enough to have been built in a naval area, which has opened its doors after 31 years. Jaffna, you will instantly notice, is stuck in a time warp. It's like waking up in that DeLorean, except here, it's all dust-covered ancient black Morris motor cars and vintage turquoise VW Beetles, sitting in forgotten garages. Giant orange coconuts peek out the backs of luridly-painted Bluebird trucks, women in floral skirts cycle nonchalantly past conical brown temples. School kids chattering in Tamil beam toothy white giggles, walking past the rich red earth of more onion fields than homes. It's all straight out of an early '80s Tollywood movie, and so, it's completely unsettling to be cautiously navigating the bumpy country roads of these Tamil badlands with a Sinhalese driver in a hybrid Prius. Roads that are silent because there are barely any cars or people here, since fuel and electricity was cut off during the war, and because there's nowhere to go to except crumbling, abandoned homes pockmarked with bullet holes. Because the war's inescapable here, a sort of shadow that clings tentatively to practically every conversation. But you can't go chasing it. And you certainly shouldn't goad unsuspecting tea-shop owners into telling you about it, three seconds after asking about the going price of tea leaves.

Jaffna *really* isn't the place to be a tourist. It's when you start doing what the locals do, that you really get under the skin of it. Venture out to the Jaffna where mammoth, abundantly smelly chunks of fish hang to dry beside garish restaurants blaring deafening Tamil pop

1. The trunk of the baobab tree on Delft Island is big enough to walk into – and they let you!

2. Blue crosses stick out of dunes next to new homes – Manalkadu's either entirely depressing or stoutly resilient

3. Jaffna's old cars ran on kerosene after petrol supplies were cut off during the war

4. King coconuts are perfect thirst-quenchers

5. You'll pass Jaffna's gloomy, abandoned homes more often than you want to

6. Meet the local fishermen at Jaffna's fish market

7. You might not recognise what you're eating, but there is street food to be had in Jaffna

Left: Rickshaws here have a character all their own







2

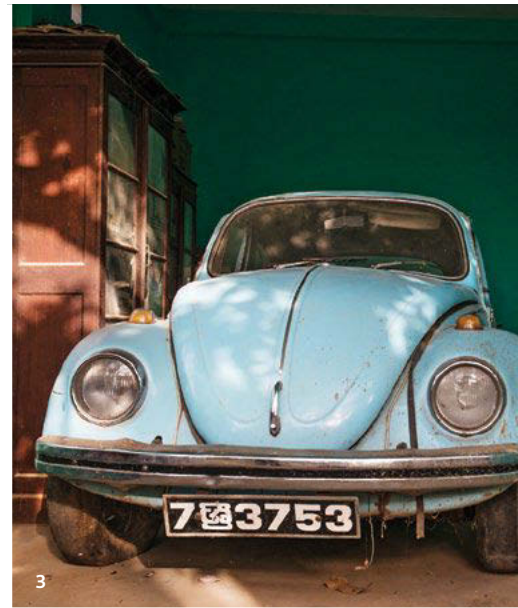


#### A BRIEF HISTORY

**1956 – 1958:** Sinhalese becomes the only official language of Ceylon, and anti-Tamil riots break out, leaving more than 200 people dead and thousands displaced.

**1971 – 1972:** Ceylon becomes Sri Lanka, and Buddhism becomes the nation's primary religion, along with new policies that continue to marginalise the Tamil minority. Tensions build.

**1976:** Prabhakaran forms the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), demanding a separate Tamil state in the north and east.



3



4



5

music. To the terracotta-tinted **Nallur Kandaswamy Temple** where nobody will speak English except to warn men not to enter with their shirts on. Or to the mineral-rich waters of the **Keerimalai** hot springs, which are abuzz with people, in contrast to the empty town. You've got to love the legend here, of ghastly horse- and mongoose-faced women from the Himalayas who journeyed here to bathe in these healing waters and magically sprouted normal heads. The 'before' statues are right outside, in case anyone forgets the story. Don't miss the deserted village of **Manalkadu**, washed away by the tsunami in 2004, and now just a smattering of huts by the sea and pastel-blue cemeteries on sand dunes. Respect comes naturally for the resilience of a people who built their homes again, metres from the sea, because this is, after all, their home. →



6



7



There are the nondescript Buddhist *dagobas* (stupas) at **Kantharodai**, and Jaffna's battered and bruised **Dutch Fort**, which changed hands between the Dutch, the British, the Sri Lankan army and the Tigers, riddled with bullet holes. Smack by the sea, walk on the ramparts for lovely views, or eat sugary-sweet ice cream in crumbly orange cones that taste exactly like childhood. Pick up a few bottles from the wine-making nuns at the **Rosarian Convent** who earn their living brewing wine and juice that the army people, who are still stationed here, buy plenty of.

Forget about Fort Hammenheil though, a prison bunker-turned-hotel now controlled by the navy. Instead of the locals, who could do with an additional source of income, it is Sri Lankan soldiers who are at your service here, and it's also a stop on the rather tasteless 'war tours' in the area. Attempt a conversation instead with the prawn fishermen barely eking out a living squatting along Jaffna's endless coastal causeways, plonked in the middle of gentle blue lagoons. They spend the night perched in stilt huts over the shallow waters catching all the shrimp and crab they can, as Jaffna's fish industry is one way to make some money. Make absolutely sure to visit Jaffna's **Archaeological Museum**, curated with the most extraordinary objects that simply need a good dusting – a giant whale bone, disintegrating Dutch tombstones, stupas and palmyrah doors, a brilliant wooden stand for about 25 umbrellas and an acutely creepy life-sized painting of Queen Victoria. The caretaker is an adorable old man who'll rattle off the artefact descriptions in English – whether you're listening or not.

And, for the sake of it, find your way to **Delft Island**. It's literally a pain in the ass to get to, over decrepit roads that will readjust your bone structure and a government ferry ride determined to drench you. It's a random, completely charming, chickens-in-the-yard kind of island with absolutely nothing to do. About 5,000 people live here, and everything that was once interesting is decidedly ramshackle. But there's something to be said about an island whose main attractions are a mammoth baobab tree (brought over by African traders) whose trunk you can stick your head into, the wild horses roaming freely (left behind by the Dutch) and the remains of an old fort made of dead coral. There's also Father David, who runs an orphanage for children who lost their families in the war, who'll take you to every spot in his jeep, showing you a water tank and crumbling stables with great fervour, and feed you a home-cooked meal of flaky-soft fish curry and rice.

It's nothing like you'd expect, but then again, Jaffna's only just learning to be normal again. →







*1983: Riots break out, marking the start of the civil war.*

*1987 – 1990: The Indian Peacekeeping Force joins arms with the Sri Lankan Army in the north and east, fighting the Tigers without much success. When the Indian troops leave, the Tigers hold Jaffna, and thousands of Muslims are expelled from the north.*

*1991: An LTTE suicide bomber kills former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.*

*1993: An LTTE bomb attack kills Sri Lankan President Premadasa.*

*1995 – 2001: Peace talks fail and the violence escalates as the war rages. A suicide attack at the airport takes out nearly half the Sri Lankan Airlines fleet.*

*2002: Norway mediates a truce. The government and the LTTE sign a temporary ceasefire. The road to Jaffna opens after 12 years as the government lifts restrictions on the north.*

A local woman pedals  
past the stately  
Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil



1. The waters off Pigeon Island are so clear, you'll hardly believe this isn't the Maldives
2. Sri Lanka's coast is a seafood-lover's delight
- 3 & 4. Trinco's fishermen are a friendly lot
5. Dolphins are incredibly playful – it's too bad you can't jump into the water with them
6. A priest plays a doleful tune on a tabla: at the Koneswaram Kovil

## TRINCOMALEE

# FOR MANTAS AND GANGSTAS

**T**HERE'S a gangster of love in front of us. Well okay, it's a jade-green auto rickshaw with those words on it.

South of Jaffna, **Trincomalee**, or Trinco, the east coast's spirited capital, is livelier and distinctly more traveller-friendly than Jaffna. It seems to have deftly shrugged off its terrible past, although telltale signs still exist. While it escaped the bombings, war and tsunami refugees poured into Trinco, and communal riots between the Tamils and the Sinhalese were common. The LTTE's gone, but there's a very real military presence here. Once an important seafaring port, its deep natural harbour is a source of envy the world over. Today, it's far less quiet than Jaffna, and it feels like a breath of fresh air.

The Sri Lankan Army controls the colonial **Fort Frederick** (Portuguese built, ruled by Dutch and British), and a wander through it leads to the **Swami Rock** (and the **Koneswaram Kovil** for the devout) at the top, from where the views of Trinco's spectacular natural harbour are, well, spectacular.

The real action, though, is at the **Nilaveli** and **Uppaveli beaches** a little outside town. They're heavenly patches of sand with plush hotels and dime-a-dozen guesthouses along the shore, and, as Hashim, the photographer with me, efficiently unearths, you can knock back dirt-cheap cocktails, and obscenely large Jaffna crab curries here that will forever remain unbeatable for their flavour. The real draw here though, is the diving, and boy, is it something. Off the shores of Nilaveli,

the microscopic **Pigeon Island National Park** has one of Sri Lanka's finest surviving reefs and coral-covered white sand that makes walking barefoot on it a slightly prickly matter. Dive in, though, and you'll probably come upon a whopper of a black manta ray snoozing contently on the ocean floor. Snorkel the shallow waters, and, apart from the regular beauties, there are black tipped reef sharks to keep you company. A word of advice: be careful and try not to singlehandedly stomp out the hard coral here!

And there are dolphins! An early-morning boat ride out to sea will find you among pods and pods of them, playing and pirouetting like you've never seen before. Yes, Trinco can get you very excited very easily. Pack up and go – it's waiting with all sorts of gangsters. →





1



*2003: The LTTE pulls out of peace talks.*

*2004: The Tigers become hostile in a bid to regain the east. The Boxing Day Tsunami wreaks devastation on coastal communities, leaving more than 30,000 dead.*

*2005: Mahinda Rajapaksa becomes the new Sri Lankan president.*

*2006 – 2008: Attacks increase and violent fighting resumes between the army and the Tigers in the north-east.*



2



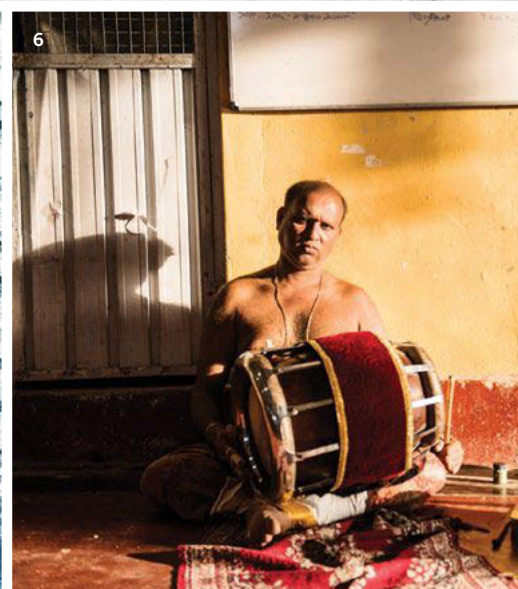
3



4



5



6



- 1, 4 & 5. A strip of beach-side resorts, Pasikudah's great for a do-nothing weekend
2. A bicycle tour with East N' West on Board offers plenty of surprises, like this shellfish
3. Wobble aboard a tiny canoe and learn to fish the local way with East N' West on Board
6. Palmyrah toddy isn't for the weak of heart (or stomach)
7. One of Batti's cool citizens

## BATTICALOA FORTIGERS AND TODDY

**P**ALMYRAH toddy clearly isn't for everyone. Probably because it tastes very much like someone dipped their toes in it. Sharp and sour all at once, this foul-smelling moonshine is a favourite with local fishermen, and you can try some for yourself at **Batticaloa**. While nearby **Pasikudah** isn't much more than a pretty wedge of palm-covered white sand, a dramatic bay of waters so shallow you can walk deep into the sea, strewn with chic resorts that are only just coming up where you should base yourself, Batti, a short drive away, is the really interesting bit. Surrounded by the Batticaloa Lagoon and the ocean, it's got a colonial past with Dutch and Portuguese forts and churches, and a long and dangerous history. The Sri Lankan Army and the Tigers wrestled for control here, with civilians paying the heaviest price. While the army ruled in name, the Tigers' word was law. Word on the street is, there's hardly a home here where someone isn't missing, from having been recruited, abducted, jailed or executed.

You can tell they're still grasping at the idea of this whole 'tourism' thing, and there's isn't much to do, save cycle along the town's narrow back roads past languid waters, and hang out with the local fishermen. **East N' West on Board** is a community-run initiative set up to help the locals, and you'll forgive the lack of infrastructure because its heart is in the right place. Go fishing with them, listen in on a very politically acidic conversation over a meal at a local home (where you can fry your catch) and try not squirm while sipping that toddy. Maybe you'll even notice that one of the gentle-looking fishermen has an intriguing big cat inked across his bare brown chest. It's heartening to know that at least some made it back home. →



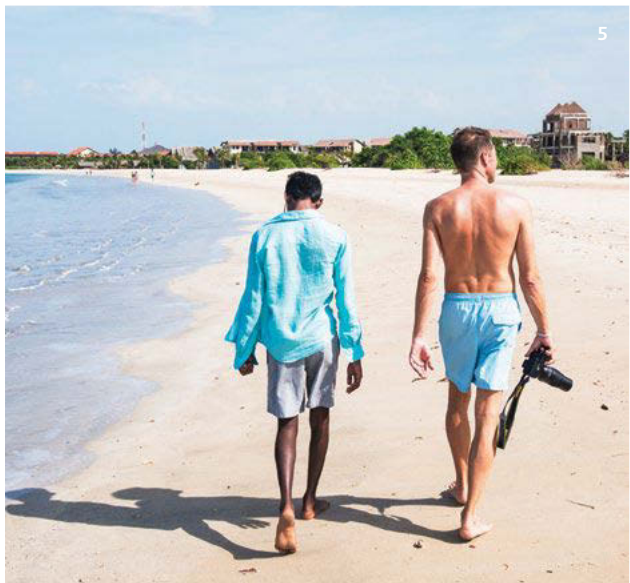
**Jan 2009:** The Sri Lankan army captures Kilinochchi, the LTTE's administrative headquarters for a decade.

**Feb 2009:** International concern for civilians trapped in the battle zone mounts; the government rejects calls for a ceasefire.

**May 2009:** The government declares victory over the Tigers, and Vellupillai Prabhakaran is killed on May 18, with accusations flying over civilians being caught in the crossfire.

**2010:** Rajapaksa wins the presidential re-election.









## ARUGAM BAY FOR THE SURF AND TURF

1. Arugam Bay's Whiskey Beach is wonderful for wallowing with cocktails at sunset
2. A hippie haven, Samantha's Folly has one of the best breakfasts in town
3. Seahorse Inn does brilliant wood-fired pizzas
- 4 & 6. If you haven't cottoned on yet, surfing is *the* thing to do at Arugam Bay
5. Some of the canoes at Pottuvil Lagoon come with their own chairs

**T**HERE are hot surfer dudes everywhere, all glistening torsos and tanned bodies, and all I can think about is pizza. It has been days of scooping curry-rice and dal off banana leaves, food that tastes saltier than the sea. I'm beginning to crave some pizza, and **Arugam Bay** is where I'll find it.

It's all the way in the south, past emerald fields, warm blue skies, monstrous waves crashing on stretches of empty coves, to a brown curl of pastel fishing boats and bright surfboards stacked along hip beach shacks. Arugam has an infectious vibe. It's beach-bum paradise, undoubtedly the east coast's friendliest destination. It's also the first 'normal' place here, which more or less resembles the world we know. Surfers come here from across the world to hang ten:

the giant frothy waves are the best in Sri Lanka, and, many say, even in Asia. An indolent village with a strip of beach where everyone knows everyone, it's home to an easygoing community of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim fishing communities who live alongside the expats and Anglo types that couldn't resist its charms.

And while it's very Tamil, Arugam wasn't exactly Tiger territory, but then again, it was worst hit on this side by the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. Ranga, the affable owner of **Ranga's Beach Huts** (one of Arugam's most popular hangouts), will never forget clambering onto a coconut tree and watching the killer waves wash away his huts. But down here, too, they're an irrepressible bunch of survivors. They've picked up the pieces and gotten right back on their feet.

Coming back to the surf though, the waves here are really something to be reckoned with. Head down to one of the surf spots and you'll be embarrassed even if you know the basics. Everyone who can surf is out, and even the Australians aren't a patch on the local boys. I spot one standing on his head on his board calmly riding a wave. True story.

Wake up at the crack of dawn for a lesson – the waves at **Crocodile Point** are gentle enough for beginners, and the local teachers are plenty encouraging. You'll need it, too, because standing up on a surfboard will require the kind of coordination you never knew you'd need, and involves a fair bit of being slammed into the water before you can stand up, or at least crouch triumphantly, on the board. The waters are delightfully cool, and all the splashing and thrashing





2



**2011–2013:** The UN issues a report accusing the Sri Lankan army of war crimes and urges an international investigation.

The Sri Lankan government refuses to cooperate.

**2013:** India, Canada and Mauritius boycott the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting hosted by Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa denies entry to a UN team tasked with investigating the army's war crimes and human rights abuses.

**Jan 2015:** Maithripala Sirisena becomes the new Sri Lankan president.



3

is entirely worth it. Also, surfing is just plain cool. You'll soon want to start dropping surf-speak like 'swell' and 'brah', even if you haven't a clue what it all means.

The best part of surfing is that it gets you ravenously hungry, and you can stuff yourself silly at breakfast, or any other meal for that matter. On our quest, we discovered a mean *shakshuka*, deliciously tangy with lashings of pesto and paired with chunks of buttery bread, an elephant-sized boat of papaya dripping with creamy yogurt, oats and raisins, stomach-churningly spicy *kottu roti*, and the fact that peanut butter, Nutella, bananas and crêpes make a world-class combination, washed down with freshly-brewed coffee. And that holy grail of food, a perfect, impossibly thin-crust pizza covered with cheese and pepperoni. Goodbye, diet and dreams of a sexy surfer body.

If you prefer to stay dry, glide in a canoe through **Pottuvil Lagoon** and its magnificent mangroves. Silent and otherworldly, it's teeming with crocs, water birds and the odd elephant herd. They have a very unique style of fishing here, where the fisherman slaps and pushes the water towards holes created by tree roots, herding and finally trapping the fish in those niches.

What's unquestionably best though, is curling up like a beach dog in the sand and succumbing to a sleepy haze induced by an ice-cold Lion lager or a very heavy smoothie. You'll think about how much you'll miss this other coast of Sri Lanka that takes a while to get used to, to get to know, to get comfortable with. And then, out of nowhere, you'll even find yourself missing Jaffna a little bit – or a lot. This one's a diamond in the rough, with its miles of coma-inducing shores and tranquil beauty. Because as perfect as the pizza is (and it is), you'll have warm memories of fat crab curries, too. 🍷



4



5



6



## Make it Happen: North-East Sri Lanka

### Essentials

#### BEST TIME TO VISIT

They say it's always raining somewhere in Sri Lanka. The east coast's dry from April to October, and the warm summer months and calm seas are just right for surfing and diving.

#### GETTING THERE

Mihin Lanka, SriLankan Airlines and Air India fly to Colombo from most Indian metros (return fares from ₹9,865 from Chennai). Train services from Colombo Fort to Jaffna recently got back on track – visit [railway.gov.lk](http://railway.gov.lk) for timetables and reservations (AC Intercity trains: ₹700).

#### GETTING AROUND

Public transport is a vague concept here. Rickshaws are available in Colombo, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Arugam Bay – bargain hard. Hiring a car and driver is your best bet. We travelled with Windmill Holidays (00-91-7506367234; [windmillholidays.in](http://windmillholidays.in); from ₹5,000/day). Or, get in touch with a chauffeur-guide directly (Iresh Sandaruwan: 00-94-717153737; [iresh.sd@gmail.com](mailto:iresh.sd@gmail.com); from ₹19/km).

#### VISA

Apply online for an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) before you travel. It will cost you ₹950 for a tourist visa valid for 30 days, and takes around 24 hours to process (more details at [eta.gov.lk](http://eta.gov.lk)).

#### EMBASSY ALERT

High Commission of India, Colombo: [hcicolumbo.org](mailto:hcicolumbo.org)

#### CURRENCY

₹1 = 2 Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR)

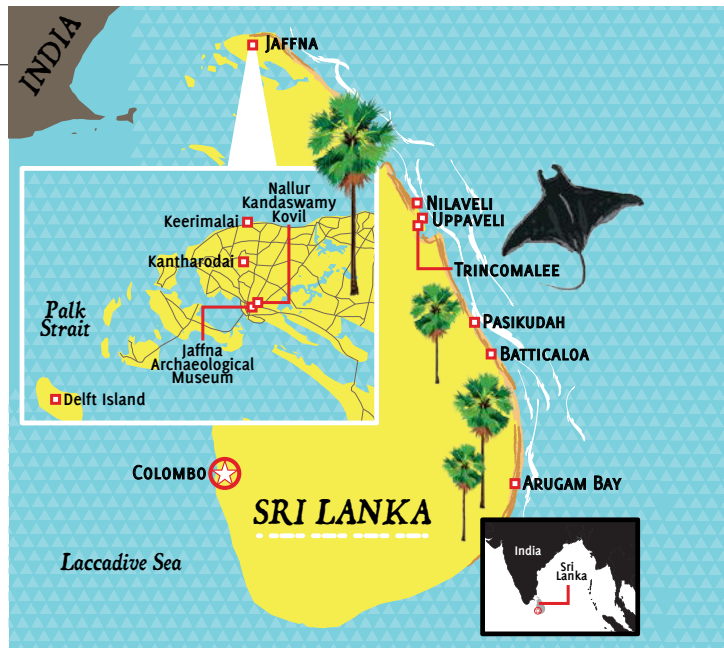
#### FURTHER READING

Plan your trip with Lonely Planet's *Sri Lanka* and the official tourism website, [srilanka.travel](http://srilanka.travel). Read *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War*, a rich, eye-opening account of the civil war, and watch *No Fire Zone: The Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*, a documentary on the last weeks of the war.

#### GOOD TO KNOW

★ Jaffna is largely Tamil; you'll need a local guide. Contact Dinesh Gunaratnam, a former local professor (00-94-770870837; from ₹950/day).

★ Debit and credit cards tend to get blocked in SL; check with your bank before leaving.



### SUGGESTED ITINERARY

**Days 1–3:** Get an early-morning flight into Colombo and drive straight to Jaffna (400km) via Anuradhapura (200km). Stop at **Mango Mango** here for a large, filling lunch of chicken curry-rice and poppadums (00-94-25-222-7501; Jayanthi Mawatha, Anuradhapura; ₹120). Bed down at **Fits Margosa** just outside Jaffna (12km), which feels like someone's home. A Colonial manor, it's got earthy, warm rooms circling an airy courtyard and open-air bathrooms. Meals are served at the courtyard – try the *kottu roti* and grilled chicken (00-94-21-224-0242; [fitsair.com/fits-margosa.html](http://fitsair.com/fits-margosa.html), [fitsmargosa@fitsair.com](mailto:fitsmargosa@fitsair.com); Station Rd, Urelu North, Chunnakam; rooms from ₹9,700, kottu: ₹200, grilled chicken: ₹250).

Start the next day with a walk around Jaffna town. Spend an hour at the eccentric **Archaeological Museum Jaffna** (Nawalar Rd; 10am–5pm; make a donation of at least ₹50), pay your respects at the **Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil** and drop in at the **Rosarian Convent** to meet the genial sisters and pick up a bottle of wine (00-94-21-205-8501; Amalivanam, Atchuvally; 8am–11am, 3pm–6pm Mon–Sat; wine: ₹200). Sit down for a typical lunch of *dal*, rice and veggies at **Malayan Café** (00-94-21-222-2373; 36–38, Grand Bazaar; ₹75/meal), a local institution that's sweet if slightly dingy. Try and get rid of any extra ears and noses you may have at the **Keerimalai natural springs** (20km; Kankasanturai; 6am–6pm; ₹10) and walk through Jaffna's eerie **Dutch Fort** (10am–5pm). If you have a day to while away, spend it on **Delft Island**. Take the ferry from the Punkudutivu pier (leaves Jaffna: 9am, leaves Delft Island: 2.30pm; ₹30 one-way) and request **Father David** to take you around

(00-94-77-644-6679; lunch: ₹100; jeep: ₹2,400, rickshaw: ₹1,200).

**Days 4–6:** Drive down to Trincomalee (230km) and check into **Chaaya Blu Trincomalee** (00-94-26-222-2307; [cinnamonhotels.com](http://cinnamonhotels.com); Uppuvali; from ₹14,050). Stroll through **Fort Frederick** and go up to **Koneswaram Kovil** temple and **Swami Rock** for the views (8.30am–7pm). Come sunset, walk into one of the shacks for dinner. **The Crab** at Chaaya Blu does an incomparable coconut-flavoured Jaffna king crab curry with fragrant jasmine rice that's ample for two, and refreshing pina coladas (10am–12am; crab curry: ₹1,100; cocktails from ₹260). Spend a morning diving and snorkelling the clear waters off **Pigeon Island National Park** with Poseidon Diving Station (00-94-917201200; [divingsrilanka.com](http://divingsrilanka.com);



**Pigeon Island View Guest House:** 9th Mile Post, Nilaveli; **Pigeon Island National Park:** 6am–6pm; entry: ₹1,000, dolphin watching: ₹7,100/four–five people, snorkelling: ₹2,500 with gear, entry and boat ride, Discover Scuba Diving: ₹5,600/two dives, certified diver: ₹2,500/single dive, and fit in a morning boat ride to spot those frolicking dolphins before you leave.

**Days 7–9:** Drive to Pasikudah (109km), and laze the evening at the beach, splashing in the incredibly shallow waters here. Stay at **Amaya Beach**. Smack on the beach, with a great pool, it has chic, comfortable rooms (reservations: 00-94-11-476-7888, resort: 00-94-65-205-0200; [amayabeach.com](http://amayabeach.com); Pasikudah Rd; from ₹7,500 with breakfast). Spend a morning sailing and snorkelling with **Sail Lanka** (00-94-71-188-5753; [sail-lanka-charter.com](http://sail-lanka-charter.com); 9am–12pm, 2pm–6pm; from ₹3,200). Head to **Batticaloa** the next day (30km), in time for a scrumptious breakfast of ghee-smeared masala thosais at **Batticaloa's temple** (00-94-65-492-6805; thosais from ₹55) before you set out with **East 'N' West on Board** to cycle past Batti's lagoons (00-94-65-222-6079; [eastnwestonboard.com](http://eastnwestonboard.com); 31, Lake Rd, Sinna Uppodai; ₹1,450/person for tour and meal). Stop for a bit of toddy, and learn the ways of the local fishermen, finishing with a simple, delicious meal at a local home.

**Days 10–12:** Drive to Arugam Bay (145km). You can do plenty or absolutely nothing here. Spend an afternoon exploring mangroves and waving at lone elephants in the **Pottuvil Lagoon** (around ₹1,200/person with rickshaw ride) and set aside a day or two for **surfing lessons** (6.30am–4.30pm; around ₹1,200/hour) – every guesthouse worth its salt can organise both for you. Stay at the tasteful and very charming **Hideaway Resort** (00-94-77-459-6670; [hideawayarugambay.com](http://hideawayarugambay.com); Ulle; from ₹5,000). Spend your time eating your way through the beach shacks and restaurants lining Arugam's only road – *kottu roti* at **Ali Restaurant** (00-94-77-912-3484; Main Rd; chicken kottu: ₹95), breakfasts at **Samantha's Folly** (00-94-77-338-7808; [samanthasfolly.com](http://samanthasfolly.com); Aloha Rd; 6.30am–10pm; shakshuka: ₹235, papaya boat: ₹235, breakfast from ₹165), finger-licking good pizzas and desserts at **The Seahorse Inn's** cosy garden restaurant (00-94-77-172-2364; [seahorseinnabay.com](http://seahorseinnabay.com); 44, Panama Rd; breakfast: 9am–11pm, dinner: 6pm–10pm; pizzas from ₹375), brilliant coffee at the laidback **Hideaway Blue Café**, at Hideaway Resort (7.30am–3.30pm; from ₹140). **Day 13:** Drive to Colombo for your flight home (300km), with a stop at **Udawalawe Elephant Orphanage** (feeding times: 9am, 12pm, 3pm, 6pm; ₹235 adult, ₹120 child).



APRIL 2015

# Mini Guides



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**1** TEAR the guide  
out along the  
perforations...

**2** FOLD the guide  
along the first  
dotted lines...



**3** FOLD  
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The city where Europe meets Asia has long played host to history on an epic scale. From Byzantine churches to Ottoman palaces, its well-preserved heritage is still very present on a visit to Turkey's largest city

#### WHY GO?

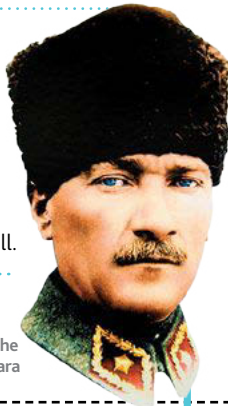
Turkey's cultural capital, a living museum of sorts, has layers of history waiting to be explored. The Greeks, Persians, Romans and Venetians have all left their mark on this city, which is the perfect blend of east and west. As you hop from historic mosques to grand palaces, with some shopping thrown in, friendly locals will offer endless cups of free Turkish apple tea to sweeten the deal.

#### WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

It's not all museums and historical sights in Istanbul. A walk by the Bosphorus will offer one the chance to listen to the sound of the müezzins echoing from their respective minarets or of haggling at the spice market or a chance to dig into mouth-watering Turkish delicacies. Istanbul is a phenomenal cultural experience for one and all.

Left: The Blue Mosque is one of the jewels of Ottoman architecture

Right: Nationalist leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk overthrew the last Turkish sultan in 1922 and the capital was moved to Ankara



MINI GUIDE APRIL 2015

# Historic Istanbul, Turkey

## Religious buildings

### HAGIA SOPHIA ①

Commissioned by the Byzantine emperor Justinian in 532 AD, this church was Christendom's crowning jewel for a millennium. It became a mosque under the Ottomans and is now a museum. A vast, seemingly unsupported dome crowns golden mosaics and stained-glass windows that bathe the space in ethereal half-light (00-90-212-522-1750; [ayasofya.muzesi.gov.tr](http://ayasofya.muzesi.gov.tr); Hagia Sophia Sq; 9am – 5pm winter, till 7pm summer; ₹750 adult, kids under 12 free).



Prepare to bargain hard at the venerable Grand Bazaar

times and Fri midday; free).

### BLUE MOSQUE ②

In the 1600s, Sultan Ahmed I set out to build a mosque to surpass Aya Sofya. He came close: the curvaceous exterior of the Blue Mosque (formally Sultanahmet Mosque) and its six minarets (a record at the time) dominate the Old City skyline. The interior features stained glass, marble latticework and tens of thousands of fine blue tiles – after which the mosque is named (00-90-212-518-1319; Sultanahmet; 9am – 7pm, closed to visitors at prayer

### SÜLEYMANIYE MOSQUE ③

This 16th-century mosque atop one of the city's seven hills was commissioned by the richest and most powerful of sultans, Süleyman the Magnificent, and certainly lives up to its patron's name. Designed by Mimar Sinan, the most renowned of all imperial architects, its spacious, light-filled interior is patterned with Iznik tiles and stained-glass windows (Prof Siddik Sami Onar Caddesi; 9am – 5.30pm, closed during prayer times; free).

## Old City monuments

### BASILICA CISTERN ④

This magnificent underground reservoir has 336 columns – each 9m high – arranged in 12 rows beneath a vast vaulted ceiling. The effect is striking: a symmetrical forest of pillars reflected in the water below. Visitors walk on raised wooden boards while schools of ghostly carp flit through the waters below ([yerebatansarnici.com](http://yerebatansarnici.com); Yerebatan Cad, Sultanahmet Fatih; 9am – 5pm; from ₹500).



Aya Sofya is the Turkish name for Hagia Sophia, or 'Holy Wisdom'

### TOPKAPI PALACE ⑤

Home to the ruling sultans of the Ottoman Empire from the 1460s to the 1850s, this sprawling palace encompasses richly-decorated chambers, tile-lined pleasure pavilions overlooking the Bosphorus, and the private world of the harem. Extravagant relics of the dynasty's intrigue and excess abound, among them an 86-carat diamond ([topkapisarayi.gov.tr](http://topkapisarayi.gov.tr); Sultanahmet Fatih; check website for timings; from ₹760).

### GRAND BAZAAR ⑥

Founded more than 500 years ago by Mehmet II, Istanbul's first Ottoman ruler, the Grand Bazaar has grown from one small warehouse into one of the world's most famous souqs. Its miles of alleyways are lined with over 4,000 shops stacked with everything from antiques, jewellery and carpets to Turkish delight. Its Old Book Bazaar dates back to Byzantine times ([kapalicarsi.com.tr](http://kapalicarsi.com.tr); Beyazit; 9am – 7pm, closed Sun; free).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS



## MINI GUIDE

### Historic Istanbul, Turkey

#### Getting around



#### Essentials

##### GETTING THERE

Turkish Airlines and Air India fly non-stop to Istanbul from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 42,000).

##### THE COST



##### DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



##### WHEN TO GO

Spring (April – May) and autumn (September – October) are the best times to visit Turkey, especially Istanbul. The weather is perfect for sightseeing and to escape the crowds.

#### Leisure buildings

##### ÇEMBERLİTAŞ HAMAMI 7

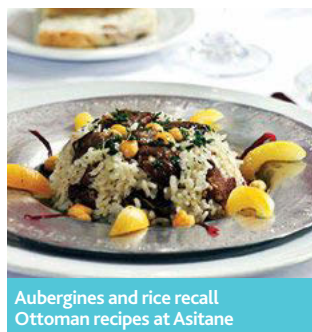
This 16th-century Turkish bath is one of the city's most beautiful. Designed by the architect Sinan, it has separate baths for men and women, with private cubicles and an ornate, domed chamber at its centre. Treatments include exfoliating scrubs and oil massages (00-90-212-522-7974; [cemberlitas.hamami.com](http://cemberlitas.hamami.com); Vezirhan Cad 8; Çemberlitaş; from ₹ 1,500).

##### ZIHNI 8

The elegant Zihni bar inhabits a century-old apartment in the Nişantaşı district. The whole place is a time-warp of wood panelling, tiled alcoves, ornate ceilings and stained glass, and makes for an evocative place for a cocktail or glass of Turkish wine (00-90-212-248-8033; Vali Konağı Cad 39, Nişantaş; closed Sun & May – Sept; glass of wine from ₹ 600).

##### ASITANE 9

Tucked away in the district of Fatih next to the exquisite Chora Church, this elegant courtyard restaurant offers a taste of



Aubergines and rice recall Ottoman recipes at Asitane

Ottoman imperial cuisine with well-tested historic recipes. From cinnamon-dusted chicken to vine leaves stuffed with sour cherries, the fruits of the team's labours are truly fit for a sultan's table (00-90-212-635-7997; [asitanerestaurant.com](http://asitanerestaurant.com); Kariye Camii Sokak 6, Edirnekapi; 12pm – 11pm; mains from ₹ 800).

##### Visa

A single-entry tourist visa costs ₹ 3930 + ₹ 750 VFS service charge. Processing time is as per the consulate's discretion ([vfsglobal.com](http://vfsglobal.com)).

#### Sleep

##### The Hotel Sari Konak 10

is full of historic touches such as antiques, etchings and embroideries. Relax by the courtyard fountain, or take in city views from the rooftop terrace (00-90-212-638-6258; [istanbulhotelsarikonak.com](http://istanbulhotelsarikonak.com); Mimar Mehmet Aga Cad 26; from ₹ 9,000 with breakfast)

Next to historic Galata Tower,

**Anemon Galata 11** features elegant rooms with painted ceilings and an opulent foyer.

The glass-walled rooftop restaurant offers splendid views (00-90-212-293-2343; [anemonhotels.com](http://anemonhotels.com); Bereketzade Mah, Büyükhendek Cad, Kuledibi; from ₹ 11,500 with breakfast).

The 120-year-old and recently-renovated **Pera Palace Hotel 12** has long been the choice of famous travellers, most notably Agatha Christie. The hotel retains a sense of luxury in its grand public spaces (00-90-212-377-4000; [jumeirah.com](http://jumeirah.com); Meşrutiyet Cad 52, Tepebaşı; from ₹ 14,500).



The Pera Palace was a favourite with Orient Express passengers

#### Veg out/ Fancy a curry?

To fulfill your craving for a *desi* hit, head to **Dubb Indian Restaurant** (00-90-212-513-7308; [dubbindian.com](http://dubbindian.com); Alemdar Mahallesi, Incili çavuş Sokak 10; Sultanahmet; 12pm – 10.30pm; mains from ₹ 500).

#### Embassy Alert

Embassy of India, Ankara: [indembassy.org.tr](http://indembassy.org.tr)

For more details, log on to [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com)

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**MINI GUIDE APRIL 2015**

# Small museums of London, the UK

Fold 2

London hosts a fine selection of lesser-known venues – from a neighbourhood gallery showing Raphael to quirky museums on fans, canals and gory Victorian medicine

## WHY GO?

Part of the charm of London is the attention it pays to the arts and culture, well illustrated in its smorgasbord of offerings of the small-museum kind.

## WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Beyond its menu of great food, shopping, attractions and sheer atmosphere, London has its big museums – the Natural History Museum, the Tate Britain, the National Portrait Gallery and the British Library among them – and a sprinkling of gorgeous special-interest galleries and museums, many of them free, which will add unexpected magic to your time in the British capital.

Left: For 200 years, the Geffrye Museum's almshouses took in some 50 poor pensioners

Right: Make sure you don't miss the Natural History Museum



## Best small museums

### GEFFRYE MUSEUM 1

This series of 18th-century ivy-clad almshouses, with an extensive herb garden, is devoted to domestic interiors, with each room furnished to show how the homes of the relatively affluent middle class would have looked from Elizabethan times right through to the end of the 19th century ([geffrye-museum.org.uk](http://geffrye-museum.org.uk); 136, Kingsland Rd; 10am – 5pm Tues – Sun; free).



The Old Operating Theatre was the place to go for amputations

### OLD OPERATING THEATRE MUSEUM 2

This is a unique venue in the tower of St Thomas's Church, which is home to one of Britain's oldest operating theatres. The museum looks back at the horrors of 19th-century medicine – pre-ether, chloroform or antiseptic – and shows natural remedies, including snail water for venereal disease and bladderwrack for tuberculosis ([thegarret.org.uk](http://thegarret.org.uk); 9a, St Thomas St; 10.30am – 5pm daily; £ 615).

### LONDON CANAL MUSEUM 3

This quirky but fascinating place is in an ice warehouse dating from the 1860s. It traces the history of Regent's Canal and the ice trade, which was huge in late Victorian London, with 35,000 tonnes imported from Norway in 1899. Upstairs is dedicated to the history of canal transport in Britain ([canalmuseum.org.uk](http://canalmuseum.org.uk); 12 – 13, New Wharf Rd; 10am – 4.30pm Tue – Sun; £ 315).

## Best small galleries

### GUILDHALL ART GALLERY 4

The City of London gallery provides a fascinating look at the politics of the Square Mile over the past few centuries, with paintings by the likes of Thomas Lawrence, George Frederick Watts and Lawrence Alma-Tadema of London in the 18th and 19th centuries ([cityoflondon.gov.uk](http://cityoflondon.gov.uk); Guildhall Yard; 10am – 5pm Mon – Sat, 12pm – 4pm Sun; free).

### PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY 5

This West End gallery awards the annual Deutsche Börse Prize, which is of major importance for contemporary photographers; past winners include Richard Billingham, Luc Delahaye, Andreas Gursky, Boris Mikhailov and Juergen Teller. Today, seven galleries are spread over three floors, plus there's an excellent café and shop ([thephotographersgallery.org.uk](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk); 16 – 18, Ramillies St; 10am –



See Edward Steichen exhibited at the Photographers' Gallery

6pm Mon – Sat, until 8pm Thur, 11.30am – 6pm Sun; free).

### DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY 6

England's oldest public art gallery was designed by the idiosyncratic Sir John Soane to house nearby Dulwich College's collection of paintings by Gainsborough, Poussin, Raphael, Rembrandt, Reynolds, Rubens, Van Dyck and others ([dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk](http://dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk); Gallery Rd; 10am – 5pm Tues – Fri, from 11am Sat – Sun; £ 565).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

Tear out page here then fold along the dotted lines



## MINI GUIDE

### Small Museums of London, the UK

#### Getting around



#### Essentials

##### GETTING THERE

A number of major international airlines fly from Indian metros to London's Heathrow Airport. British Airways, Jet Airways and Air India fly non-stop from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹47,500).

##### THE COST



##### DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



##### WHEN TO GO

Winters – November to February – are wet, snowy and cold, while summers – April to September – are warmer and drier. You can rely on a sudden drizzle anytime of the year, though.

#### Best specialist museums

##### MUSEUM OF BRANDS 7

This shrine to nostalgia is the brainchild of designer Robert Opie, who has amassed advert memorabilia and packaging since the age of 16. Look out for early Monopoly sets, the debut of Mickey Mouse and a primitive Cluedo set ([museumofbrands.com](http://museumofbrands.com); 2, Colville Mews, Lonsdale Rd; 10am–6pm Tues–Sat, 11am–5pm Sun; ₹700).



Yesteryear's store cupboards at the Museum of Brands

##### FAN MUSEUM 8

This wonderful collection of fans includes ivory, tortoiseshell, peacock-feather and kitschy battery-powered versions. The Georgian townhouse setting in Greenwich also has a Japanese-style garden, plus the Orangery, with lovely *trompe-l'œil* murals and afternoon tea ([thefanmuseum.org.uk](http://thefanmuseum.org.uk); 12, Crooms Hill; 11am–5pm Tues–Sat, from 12pm Sun; ₹380).

seat for a lesson in which 'pupils' are taught by a strict school ma'am in full Victorian regalia ([raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk](http://raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk); 46–50, Copperfield Rd; 10am–5pm Wed & Thurs, 2pm–5pm, Victorian lessons on first Sun of the month; free).

##### Fancy a curry?

Spice of India offers flavourful curries and authentic Indian food, as well as a range of excellent wines and beverages (00–44-20-7262-5603; [spiceofindialondon.co.uk](http://spiceofindialondon.co.uk); 12a, Bathurst St, Lancaster Gate; mains from ₹300).

##### RAGGED SCHOOL MUSEUM 9

This is a charming combination of mock Victorian schoolroom, re-created East End kitchen and social history museum. Take your

#### Sleep

Notting Hill's **Portobello Gold** 10 has several small doubles, a suite with open-hearth fireplace, and a studio with exclusive access to the roof terrace complete with a putting green ([portobellogold.com](http://portobellogold.com), [reservation@portobellogold.com](mailto:reservation@portobellogold.com); 95–97, Portobello Rd; from ₹7,100).

**The Bingham** 11 is a riverside Georgian townhouse near Richmond with 15 Art-Deco-inspired rooms. There's an excellent restaurant and lounge bar with some irresistible cocktails ([thebingham.co.uk](http://thebingham.co.uk), [info@thebingham.co.uk](mailto:info@thebingham.co.uk); 61–63, Petersham Rd; from ₹12,300).

Glistening with chandeliers, dotted with trademark fluffy sheep and overseen by highly-trained staff, **The Goring** 12 in Belgravia is a supremely grand, albeit highly relaxed, slice of England ([thegoring.com](http://thegoring.com); [reception@thegoring.com](mailto:reception@thegoring.com); 15, Beeston Pl; from ₹35,000).



Bespoke furniture and Italian linen at the The Goring

#### Visa

The UK Border Agency issues short-term tourist visas, single or multiple entries, for up to six months, which cost ₹8,300 through VFS. The processing time is between two and 15 working days; appointments need to be scheduled by email with VFS ([ukinindia.fco.gov.uk](mailto:ukinindia.fco.gov.uk), [vfs-uk-in.com](http://vfs-uk-in.com)).

#### Embassy alert

High Commission of India, London: [hclondon.in](http://hclondon.in)

For more details, log on to [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com)

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Sample top-notch French reds in Beaune, crisp whites in Chablis and some lesser-known vintages in the outer regions, all amid some of Europe's most gorgeous scenery

#### WHY GO?

An expedition to Burgundy offers a menu of wines, picturesque French countryside, luxurious hotels and intense, organic experiences for the eyes and palate.

#### WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Immerse yourself in some of the finest wines and vineyards in the world from different AOCs (controlled French geographical regions, or appellations), blend your own wine, and enjoy it in an elegant French restaurant or à deux in your own little private retreat. Burgundy also demands exploration, and when the journey of wine discovery gets tiring (for a while), Burgundy's serene and rustic hotels offer the perfect escape.

Left: Medieval Château de la Rochepot was restored at the end of the 19th century

Right: Most cellars offer tasting sessions before you make your purchases



MINI GUIDE APRIL 2015

# Wine in Burgundy, France

## Chablis

### BILLAUD-SIMON 1

The well-to-do, picturesque town of Chablis has made its fortune growing, ageing and marketing the dry white wines that have carried its name across the world. Get off the beaten path to this unpretentious spot on the verdant edge of the canal, where excellent wines represent each of the appellations (*billaud-simon.com*; 1, Quai de Reugny; by appointment).

### LA CHABLISIENNE 2

Chablis, made exclusively from chardonnay grapes, is now divided into four AOCs: Petit Chablis, Chablis, Chablis Premier Cru and, most prestigious of all, Chablis Grand Cru. This large cooperative cellar was founded in 1923 and carries a variety of vintages, including five of Chablis's seven *grands crus* (00-33-3-8642-8990; *chablisienne.com*; 8, Boulevard Pasteur; check website for timings).



A top-quality Chablis Grand Cru will usually cost more than ₹9,500

### CHABLIS VITITOURS 3

Local wisdom says it is best to taste in the morning while the palate is fresh; to help visitors appreciate the finest of wines, Vititours' selection of tours and tastings includes a half-day starting at 9.30am, as well as a 90-minute tour of a vineyard with one tasting, and a full-day vineyard tour. All include hotel pick-ups (00-33-6-1147-8298; *chablis-vititours.fr*; tours from ₹4,600/ person; tours start from the Chablis tourist office or from the hotel you're staying at).

## Côte d'Or

### ALTER & GO 4

Burgundy's most renowned vintages come from the vine-covered *département* of Côte d'Or, where there are innumerable places to sample and purchase world-class wine. Get the inside track from this specialist tour company, sampling vintages from the Côte de Beaune and Côte de Nuits wine regions on a full-day tour (*alterandgo.fr*; day tour from ₹13,800).

### MARCHÉ AUX VINS 5

Beaune is the unofficial capital of the Côte d'Or, and the cellars under the city hold millions of bottles of some of the best wines in existence. Armed with a *tastevin* (shallow silver cup), you can experience them for yourself in the candlelit former Église des Cordeliers. Wandering among the vintages takes about an hour (00-33-3-8025-0820; *marcheauxvins.com*; 7, Rue de l'Hôtel-Dieu, Beaune; check website for timings; tastings from ₹850/ person).



Harvesting chardonnay grapes in the southern Côte d'Or

### ROUTES DES GRANDS CRUS 6

This marked route covers 60km along the Côte d'Or and Côte de Beaune. It brings together 37 wine towns and villages between Dijon and Santenay. It can be explored in a day, taking in stone-built villages, seas of vineyards and panoramic views from the upper slopes. Keep your eyes open for vintages from Joseph Faiveley in Nuits-St-Georges and Romanée-Beaune (*cotedeor-tourisme.com*).

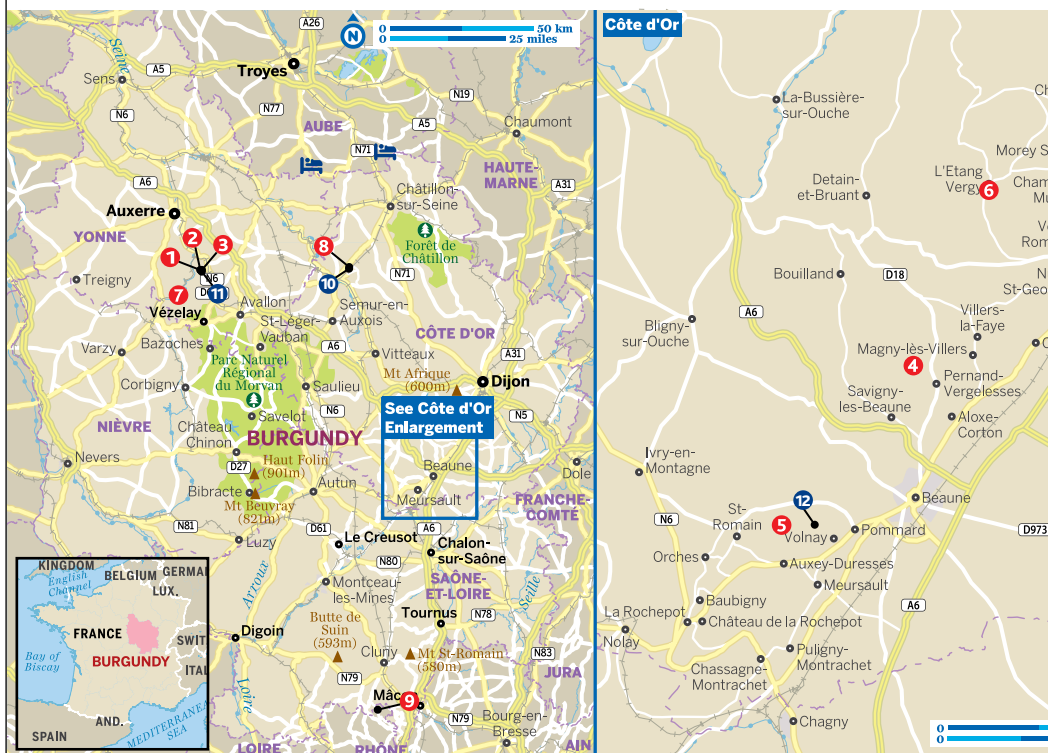
TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS



## MINI GUIDE

### Wine in Burgundy, France

#### Getting around



#### Essentials

##### GETTING THERE

Turkish Airlines, Air France, Lufthansa, Swiss International Airlines, Jet Airways and British Airways fly to Lyon-Saint Exupéry Airport (201 km from Burgundy), from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹42,500).

##### THE COST



##### DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



##### WHEN TO GO

September and October are great months to visit Burgundy, with wine-related festivals making the most of the warm sun and the new harvests. The other good time to go is May when the weather is lovely.

#### Best of the rest

##### IRANCY 7

Ask locals where they go to taste western Burgundy's wines and many will name this relatively-new AOC (1999). Picturesque villages are set amid rolling hills and spring-blooming cherry orchards, and there are many *domaines* from which to sample: try Thierry Richoux, which is converting to all-organic techniques (00-33-3-8642-2160; [irancy.org](http://irancy.org); Thierry Richoux, 73, Rue Soufflot; tasting and sales at the winery 9.30am – 12pm & 2pm – 6.30pm Mon – Sat; wines from ₹500).

##### CHÂTILLONNAIS 8

Approximately 20 villages around Châtillon-sur-Seine produce red and white wines and, north of town, Burgundy's own bubbly, Crémant de Bourgogne. Follow the Route du Crémant, marked by white-on-brown signs, to the vineyards that create this light sparkling white or rosé. The Champagne region's Côte des Bar vineyards are about 50km further north ([bourgogne-wines.com](http://bourgogne-wines.com)).



Vineyards and rolling hills at Irancy in western Burgundy

##### MÂCONNAIS 9

To really get off the beaten path, head to the Mâconnais vineyards, Burgundy's southernmost wine-growing area. The town of Mâcon, on the west bank of the Saône, is at the heart of this area. Its tourist office has info on vineyard visits. Expect to sample rich or fruity white wines ([macon-tourism.com](http://macon-tourism.com)).

##### Embassy alert

Embassy of India, Paris: [ambinde.fr](http://ambinde.fr)

#### Sleep

The pleasant **Hôtel de la Côte d'Or** 10 in Châtillon-sur-Seine is a former post house dating back to 1737. Its rooms have antique furnishings and there is also a rustic restaurant (00-33-3-8097-2454; [logishotels.com](http://logishotels.com); 2, Rue Charles Ronot; from ₹8,000).

In an old mill in Chablis, the five rooms and two suites at the **Hotel du Vieux Moulin** 11 are understated, contemporary and afford fine views of the Serein River. The breakfast room has top views and there's a restaurant downstairs (00-33-3-8642-4730; [larochehotel.fr](http://larochehotel.fr); 18, Rue des Moulins; Chablis; from ₹8,400).

**Villa Louise Hotel** 12 is a tranquil mansion house just outside Beaune with elegant, modern rooms. The expansive garden stretches to the edge of the vineyard and a separate gazebo shelters the sauna, steam bath and pool. There is also a private cave, perfect for wine tastings (00-33-3-8026-4670; [hotel-villa-louise.fr](http://hotel-villa-louise.fr); 9, Rue Franche, Aloxe-Corton; from ₹9,600).



The Villa Louise Hotel is set in a converted 17th-century building

#### Veg out

Vegetarians will find happiness at **Le Shanti** (00-33-9-8109-0931; 69, Rue Berbisey, Dijon; 12pm – 12am Mon – Sat).

#### Visa

A short-stay tourist Schengen visa for France takes upto 15 calendar days to process ([vfs-france.co.in](http://vfs-france.co.in); visa fee € 60 [approx ₹4,138] + ₹966 VFS charge + ₹60 bank-handling charge).

For more details, log on to [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com)

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